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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# LISTENING TO GIRLS' VOICES: NARRATIVES OF EXPERIENCE

By

Hedy Bach

A thesis

submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Education

The Department of Elementary Education

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring, 1993

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DATE APRIL, 1, 1993

No one ever told us we had to study our lives,
make of our lives a study, as if learning natural history
or music, that we should begin
with the simple exercises first
and slowly go on trying
the hard ones, practicing till strength
and accuracy became one with the daring
to leap into transcendence,take the chance
of breaking down in the wild arpeggio
or faulting the full sentence of the fugue
And in fact we can't live like that: we take on
everything at once before we're forced to begin
in the midst of the hardest movement,
the one already sounding as we are born.
At most we're allowed a few months
of simply listening to the simple line
of a woman's voice singing a child
against her heart. Everything else is too soon,
too sudden, the wrenching-apart, that woman's heartbeat
heard ever after from a distance,
the loss of that ground-note echoing
whenever we are happy, or in despair.

Adrienne Rich
from "Transcendental Etude"
in The Dream of a Common Language

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FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **Listening to girls' voices: Narratives of experience** submitted by **Hedy Bach** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

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To

Chloé, for her constant reminder of the hope and possibility for creating new spaces in girlhood;

Steve, for always caring and maintaining his sense of humor;

my mother and father, for the strength they give me; and

Karen for always being there.

Abstract

The research literature points to a gap in our knowledge of the development of adolescent girls. This narrative inquiry describes the lived and told experiences of four girls' lives inside and outside of school. This study also tells my story as researcher, woman, learner and mother. Data for the study included conversations and photographs. The inquiry is represented and given meaning through narrative accounts constructed from the conversations with the girls and through their photography. Four narrative accounts are presented. School and society form the context of the girls' development of a sense of self. This is explored in themes of 1) relationships built within an ethic of care; 2) relationships with families; 3) invisible work; 4) girls' friendships; and 5) the beauty myth. This narrative inquiry suggests new ways to understand girls' development, what it means to be educated as a girl and possibilities for developing more appropriate school curriculum for girls.

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This thesis has been a collaborative endeavour. With Jean Clandinin's conceptualizations I have permanently changed the way I think and see my world. Working with Jean has meant having the space to grow and thrive as a woman and as a mother. For this time and connection I will always be grateful. There was a time I would have lacked the courage to write this thesis but with Jean's encouragement, affection, and inspiration I found the strength; she is central to this creation.

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# PART I

## CHAPTER ONE

## NARRATIVE BEGINNINGS

### Learning to live the Barbie story

"But Mom you need to learn to like Barbies" whimpers my daughter, Chloé. Her eyes are watering, she is sniffing, she has a cough, and a mild case of chicken pox. I am at home being her health keeper which means a lot of extra playtime for both of us. She pleads with me to play Barbies since there are no other children around. Enthusiastically she vows that it would be 'really fun' as she crawls onto my lap with her continued promise of what fun it will be to play together. I give her a tight hug and sigh. I am tired. And all the while, I am thinking about how to get out of playing this story. Yet, I feel badly. I know she is not feeling well and I know that she 'loves' to play Barbies and I am "attentive in my love" (Ruddick, 1989) for her. I feel for her as I look into her watering eyes and hear her pleading voice. I am thinking of ways not to engage in this play. I despise Barbies.

I have thought a lot about why and what it is that I take exception to about Barbies. I have reached no final certainty in my own thinking, other than I am sure I 'just don't like her image'. Is it that Barbie embodies society's obsessive fascination with demeaning images of women? Is it the blazing trails of consumerism? Or, I am irked by her plastic perfection? Perhaps, it is that Barbie is stereotyped as a sex object, a slightly pornographic woman? Is it because some see her as having succeeded in restoring female sexual power to women? My questions fill my mind as I wonder why I do not want to play out this Barbie story. I suggest other options of play for my daughter, telling her we can paint, read, play with her Brio train set, even watch a video. Anything but Barbies I think. No, she really wants to play Barbies. No one gave the gift of Barbies to my daughter. She plays with the Barbie dolls from my girlhood - ones she found deep inside a toy box of mine that appeared when we moved. She plays with the Barbies that I played with and loved. As a Barbie-loving girl I appreciated my dolls, their dresses, their shoes

and boots - they even have ski equipment. I think back to when I was a young girl and I remember I was very industrious with my Barbie play. I was always inventing and designing fashions, building magical mansions, and creating 'action accents' such as telephones, ovens, and unique furniture pieces. I created with anything I could find, things that could be pummelled, gouged, or pasted into shape. Now I wonder what actually happened to women, who in their girlhood, had collections of Barbie dolls?

I became a feminist. Knowing how I have restoried my lived story of playing with Barbies raises new questions for me. Maybe Barbies do not influence the women the girls become. Maybe I ought to play with my daughter and overlook my haunting questions. But I can't dismiss them. I wonder. Is it only a question of political incorrectness to play Barbies with my daughter? I answer myself by saying, I know I am not an unthinking woman. I know I do not want to see my daughter fulfil the role patriarchy prescribes for women. Even as I concede and lie down on the floor with her I continue to wonder what images we can create as we play out this uncomfortable story of Barbies. I want to offer her alternative places to those traditionally prescribed by patriarchal mythology, the ones Le Guin (1989) refers to as "Failed Woman - the old maid, the barren woman, the castrating bitch, the frigid wife, the lezzie, the libber, the Unfeminine" (p.156-7). I know I don't want Barbie to be a "female man", who is "ready to dress for success, carries a designer briefcase, kills for promotions, and drinks the Right scotch" (Le Guin, 1989, p.157). I have reached no certainty on how I ought to portray Barbie. I continue to think about what images, places, and plots resemble women as women. Heilbrun (1990) writes "what matters is that our lives do not serve as models; only stories do that" (p.37). And so I continue to tap at my lingering thoughts of what it means to resemble woman as woman. What stories will we tell and retell for ourselves and for our daughters?

I watch, intently, Chloé's growing awareness of how she chooses and goes about portraying the dolls with which she plays. I value our playtime, it is fantasy and fun. Our play becomes a search for my daughter's point of view, knowing it is accompanied by some unwelcomed disclosure of my hidden and not so hidden attitudes (Paley, 1986). In doing so I have provided Chloé with some alternative stories for Barbie

and myself. Perhaps, by providing Barbie with a conscience this will help me 'learn to like Barbie' again. Maybe, it simply makes me feel better about this kind of play - inside myself, as her mother. I listen with respect to Chloé's conversations as she weaves in stories, poems, and responses to books that we have shared. She makes connections to real and imagined events of our lives, and I try to let my "curiosity" accompany her stories, as she discards the old ones and creates new ones (Paley, 1986). Today I decided Barbie would go to the University and together we write some stories about her life. Chloé loves the idea and, as I look at the delight on her face, I wonder what sense she makes of it all?

One week later:

This morning I asked Chloé if she had anything to say about Barbies. She looks happy. She is healthy again. Her eyes are shining and she is busy at her desk. She glances at me as she continues to make a paper structure. She is printing our names on it - her paper, stickers, pens, tape and a stapler are scattered all about and she tells me, "I have no comment right now. Maybe later Hedy". I giggle and write our story. (Journal, 91-09)

Why do I begin with this story? I begin here because this is where my questions begin about what it means for a girl to be educated. It raises questions about the lived curriculum of children in our schools and society. It raises questions about how females learn to live and tell their stories in response to their friends, parents, and teachers. And finally it raises questions for me about how I am learning to retell and relive the stories I lived and told as a girl and as a mother.

This is a Photograph of me

by Margaret Atwood, 1976

It was taken some time ago.
At first it seems to be
a smeared
print: blurred lines and grey flecks
blended with the paper;

then, as you scan
it, you see in the left-hand corner
a thing that is like a branch: part of a tree
(balsam or spruce) emerging
and, to the right, halfway up
what ought to be a gentle
slope, a small frame house.

In the background there is a lake,
and beyond that, some low hills.

(The photograph was taken
the day after I drowned.

I am in the lake, in the center
of the picture, just under the surface.
It is difficult to say where
precisely, or to say
how large or small I am:
the effect of water
on light is a distortion

but if you look long enough,
eventually
you will be able to see me.)

I remember loving being viewed as a fashion model. I loved my place as a model. I had a lingering discomfort in the atmosphere of my experiences with what it meant being a "model". Even as a young woman, however, I was uncomfortable with the reductive and stereotyped images of what defined "beautiful" women. Yet I earned a very respectable wage for my body, certainly more money than for my skills. I was uncertain about how to live my life and I fell deeply into the commercial sexualized

mystique of what it meant to be a model. My fairy tale achievement was an adventure. Just as Carroll's heroine Alice in Alice In Wonderland was trustful, ready to accept the wildest possibilities with all that utter trust that only dreamers know and lastly curious -- wildly curious, so was I. It was my eagerness and enjoyment with being a model that led me to my state of a free fall into the rabbit hole that "went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well" (Carroll, 1960, p.26). I keep reminding myself that even as I lived this story my well-meaning partner, family, friends and physicians asked me why I did this to myself?

I learned early what "success" meant in the competitive world of modelling. Implied in success was a sense that to be successful one had to transform behavior and body parts. There seemed nothing very remarkable in that to me. At that time I did not think so very much about my own success as a model. But as my story of self as a successful model unfolded, I never thought how to get out of being viewed. I was taught and persuaded to "survey" myself continually. As I try to tell my story, Berger's (1972) words are helpful.

> To be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space, into the keeping of men. ...From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (p.46)

As a model I came to see the "surveyor" and the "surveyed" within myself, the two constituent yet always distinct elements of my identity as a woman.

There were times when my success was true even though the image I had of myself was absolutely false. Much of the pleasure of my success was often marred as I fussed madly over the "feminine chores" (McRobbie, 1991; Brownmiller, 1984; Brown, 1991), particularly with my straight hair. I got a "perm". To intensify my hair's radiance, I had it highlighted. I painted my finger and toe nails, first with a base coat, then color, and

finally a top coat. I lined my lips, filled them with color, and glossed them over. Almost daily I shaved hair off my body and tweezed away eyebrow hairs. I curled my eye lashes with a little curler that had scissor handles so that I could pull my eye lids tight. Then I applied eye shadow, in shades of bruises, green, purple, grey and blue. I dreamed of being on the cover of Vogue. I tried so hard.

As I continued to learn to see myself both as "surveyor" and "surveyed", I devalued my self worth. As I tell and retell my story, I can see how I had turned myself into an object, most particularly what Berger (1972) writes "an object of vision: a sight" (p.47). With five years experience working in the fashion industry, I knew that my already straight up and down body needed to be fed in order to stay vital, to be a "sight". So as my modelling work became inconsistent, I began to question my ways of seeing myself. Who was I? What was I? What was I seeing? What should I be doing at twenty years of age?

Reflecting back I did not know what was happening to me but over two months I do remember a compulsiveness about my growing despair and hatred of my body. I began experimenting by eating as little as I could. My hatred of what I saw as my less than perfect body persisted as I sucked myself into a vortex. I drank only tea, coffee, and water, and nibbled vegetables. There were moments lost. I began losing control. I looked tired from nervous exhaustion. My fatigue meant I slowly excluded myself from public life and I left myself hiding in shame. The guilt came from wanting my body to be thinner. It seemed the one thing I could control was my weight. Trying so hard hurt. I did not recover quickly. I became so physically weak that I walked by holding on to walls, I could not respond even when I was called to do fashion work. I was fainting, vomiting and living with violent headaches. I coughed until I cracked two ribs. Being outdoors or exercising was unthinkable. Life was a blur nearly impossible to live. I had reached a point where all my energy went to my "illness". I knew it was stupid, yet, I still believed that if only I was thinner, less than my one hundred and twelve pounds, I would have more modelling work. Everything was so warped.

Even as I lived that story, I knew I was in a callous profession. I wanted more success. I loved the attention, the uncertainty, and the

space to be unpredictable within the boundaries of the work. I loved the rapid pace of the quick changing fashion industry. I was also proud of my work. I could see my portfolio building up nicely. I was doing good and feeling bad (Miller 1976). I bought deeply into what Wolf (1990) has termed the "the beauty myth" which prescribes behavior, not appearance. The beauty myth "is actually composed of emotional distance, politics, finance, and sexual repression....it is not about women at all" (Wolf, 1990, p.13). The beauty myth is about the real struggle between pain and pleasure, freedom and compulsion. The myth is not about attacking what makes women feel good, only what makes women feel bad in the first place. The beauty myth is about patriarchal institutions and institutional power. This patriarchal conceptual framework is socially constructed and explains a "set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions which shape, reflect, and explain our view of ourselves and our world" (Kramer, 1991, p.88). The beauty myth is identified by value-hierarchical thinking where greater value is attributed to that which is higher, for example, thin above fat, young above old, men above women. It is not a new myth. Early stories from our foremothers tell us each generation since about 1830 has had to fight its version of the "beauty myth".

> "It is very little to me," said the suffragist Lucy Stone in 1855, "to have the right to vote, to own property, etcetera, if I may not keep my body, and its uses, in my absolute right." Eighty years later women won the right to vote, and the first wave of organized women's movement has subsided. And it was Virginia Woolf who wrote it would be decades before women could tell the truth about their bodies. (Wolf, 1990 p.12.)

The beauty myth has existed in the many ways we have socialized women and girls into the "proper" experience at home, and in work, in literature and the media, in relationships, between men and women and women and women. It is, however, the most insidious mystique of femininity yet (Wolf, 1990).

Unfortunately, the fashion industry supports value-hierarchical thinking as normative dualisms rather than including or complementing ways of thinking, feeling, or being. As a young woman in search of success I had gone to great lengths to acquire the prescribed perfection. As my thinking and behavior became fragmented and oppressive coupled with my

feelings of inferiority I slowly "awoke" to see my aspirational links to the glamour magazines as worthless.

Gradually with help from Steve, my partner, and an alternative doctor, I healed. I became aware that I wasn't giving myself the care I needed to know myself. I began to doubt the prescribed behaviors that dominate the modelling "beauty myth". I stopped living the dangers that destroyed my self confidence. I changed my way of thinking which had explained, justified, and maintained the subordination of living out the "beauty myth". With Steve's help I found new directions in which to work. His continued care allowed me to exist outside the "male gaze" (Heilbrun, 1988, p.82) which encouraged me to reconceptualize myself and my relation to my lived world. Over some trying months and by dropping out of my modelling dream, I was "awakened" to the main issue, that is, I did not want to gamble my life away.

My story of pain and compulsion is real. As I reconstruct my "horizons of knowing" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), I learn to live a new story. Dillard (1987) helps me think about how I became aware of my awakenings of knowing when she writes:

> I awoke at intervals until....I was more often awake than not. I noticed this process of waking, and predicted with terrifying logic that one of these years not far away I would wake continuously and never slip back, and never be free of myself again. (Dillard, p.11)

Now as I look back I consider the ways I can retell my story with new insight, with added possibilities. I continue to be uneasy with the concept of what it means to be a beautiful woman. I am left wondering why a society continues to exploit girls and women. We, as girls and women, very often explain the structural difficulties of our experience in society in terms of our own inadequacies rather than in terms of societal structures (Spender, 1982). As we try to create spaces where we have been absent, invisible, inadequate, and deficient, we try to create spaces for women and girls beyond the "beauty myth". We do not need to change our bodies, we need to change society's rules.

What would it be like to construct female narratives free from the political and social exigencies of spending time, money, and emotional effort on appearance. According to Wolf (1990) 1 million cases of

anorexia are reported in North America each year, and 150,000 American women die each year from self-induced experiments. Knowing this I want new stories for girls. Women are overwhelmingly dissatisfied with their bodies according to surveys (Leon, et al, 1989; Din, 1991; Holmes & Silverman, 1992). If beauty is in the eye of the beholder who decides what it means to be beautiful? What potential might be released if we socialized girls and woman to be satisfied with their bodies? How do girls perceive themselves? Katherine Gilday's (1990) film "The Famine Within" indicates that body dissatisfaction is affecting younger and younger women.

Beauty can not be seen as universal or changeless. There are no ideals of female beauty stemming from one Ideal Woman. Literature on femininity, female sexualization, and issues of the body seek new relationships for the female body through practising a politics of the body which enables us to live a life of resistance, to perceive in different ways, to forge new connections, and to not subjugate ourselves (Gabor, 1972; Woodman, 1982; Brownmiller, 1984; Haug, 1987; Peirce, 1990; Brown, 1990; Bordo, 1990). And so I wonder who decides what qualities embody beauty for a given period of time? Do women want to embody beauty? Do men want to possess women who embody it? And is this embodiment imperative for women and not for men? Is beauty merely symbolic of female behavior of a period that is considered desirable?

I am troubled about girls attempting to live out accepted cultural myths written of womanhood. I know we do not get what we deserve. I am saddened and angry when I read how the "beauty myth" makes women feel "worth less". Seldom do I hear or see statements that say women are all right. This must change. I have severe reservations about the traditional descriptions of the beauty backlash shaping our lives as women and I wonder how girls have come to make meaning of the myth. We know women are destroying themselves physically and depleting themselves psychologically. How do we begin? How might women and girls live beyond the myth? How might we tell the story differently? I know as I deconstruct my stories of modelling and attempt to free myself from the political and social exigencies of spending time, money, and emotional effort on appearance that it is challenging. So as I read, tell and

retell my stories and see how they are constructed around the "beauty myth" I find myself hoping for different directions and a reinterpretation of "beauty". What are the possibilities of seeing "beauty" in a new way, one that is noncompetitive, nonhierarchical, and nonviolent (Wolf, 1990)?

## CHAPTER TWO

## CONTEXTUALIZING MY NARRATIVE RE-PRESENTATIONS

### Narrative Inquiry

There is difficulty in telling my story here for I continue to live it. There are stories that stay "off the record". Yet, I know as "we tell ourselves stories of our past, make fictions or stories of it, these narrations 'become' the past, the only part of our lives that is not submerged" (Heilbrun, 1988, p.51). It is my hope not to submerge my stories. I want to tell and retell them so that I will continue to find other ways to relive and transform my life stories in our culture. Narrative inquiry is a way to allow me to engage in that possibility.

It is through narrative inquiry, in retelling stories of my lived experiences that I am enabled to make my stories part of a public discourse. I hope these stories become part of our cultural stories passed on to the next generation. As I share stories "for the record" I think about who really "hears" women's and girls' stories and who "ought" to listen. It is my hope that we will continue to break the silence of our lives and create safe public spaces in which to tell our stories; spaces that will describe and explain human life from multiple perspectives.

This study describes the lived and told stories of four eleven, twelve and thirteen year old girls. According to the literature adolescence is a critical time in girls' lives. How might we interpret girls' experiences at a time in their lives when they are faced with "how to listen both to herself and to the tradition, how to care for herself as well as for others" (Gilligan, 1990). My narrative inquiry is constructed around the understanding of the meaning four girls make of their lives through an analysis of conversations I had with them as they told their stories and as they shared photographs of their lives. From analyzing conversations with the girls and studying their photographs, I offer interpretations of how they construct notions of self by focusing on stories of relationships and responsibility to self and others.

By engaging in this research project it was my hope to "hear deeply" (Daly, 1978) and value the stories of the girls by being attentive to their voices. By voice I mean something akin to what Britzman writes:

> Voice...is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community... The struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else. Finding the words, speaking for oneself, and feeling heard by other are all part of this process.... Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of her/his environment and hence, to langauge, and the individual's relationship to the other, since understanding is a social process. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.5)

## Listening to the voices of girls

I plead for my sex, not myself.

Wollstonecraft 1792, in Brody, 1983

New directions in the study of adolescent development call for and urge new research on adolescent girls. A need to reconsider adolescent development stems from changes in our understanding of infancy and childhood. Repeatedly, the literature points to a gap in our research knowledge, to our "inattention to girls, and the process of feminine development in adolescence" (Lyons, 1990, p.32). New directions in the study on adolescent girls has been called for by: Bettelheim, 1966; Adelson, 1966; Miller, 1976; Adelson & Doehrman,1980; Miller, 1981; Spender, 1982; Gilligan 1977 through 1991; Surrey, 1985, 1987; Caplan, 1985; Hancock, 1989; Prose, 1990; and Avery, 1991. Acknowledging this inattention raises the question of what has been missed by not studying girls? What can we hope to gain, by starting to take a new look at this past inattention, for future generations of Canadian girls? What is this inattention supporting? Is it supporting a suspicion that there is nothing important or valuable to be learned by studying girls and women? How can we design more appropriate school situations for girls in early adolescence?

The stark assessment that "adolescent girls have simply not been studied" calls my attention to the masculine bias in the theory building

research on adolescent girls. A distorted picture of social reality is constructed when we use "borrowed" theories that have been informed and shaped by an overall androcentric perspective (Eichler, 1987; 1988). What happens when scholars, researchers, and teachers use agentic approaches and prescribed practices which are hierarchical and morally indefensible? What is our vision of the direction that knowledge should take? What happens when we listen to girls' voices about such important concepts as connection, separation and responsibility to self and others. What does it mean when educators look to psychology to justify curriculum decisions?

The dialogue regarding women has changed to a large degree. Some crucial development in inquiry about women's lives and possibilities has had to do with the probing of the difference in women's moral development, ethics, and ways of knowing which have been documented for example by Gilligan, 1977; Noddings, 1984; Keller, 1985; and Belenky et. al, 1986 and others. In Making Connections by Gilligan, Lyons, and Hanmer (1990) attention is drawn to a changing tradition of including girls' voices, listening to girls and asking again about the meaning of self, relationship, and morality - concepts central to any psychology of human development. In their findings from listening to girls they found that "one can only experience self in the context of relationship with others and that one can only experience relationship if one differentiates other from self" (Gilligan, 1990, p.328).

Their research is vital for those of us working with girls as we develop further insight and a different perspective of the importance of relationships in girls' lives. From this literature I have come to see that:

> When we join Women's Studies with the study of girls' development it becomes clear why adolescence is a critical time in girls' lives - a time when girls are in danger of losing their voices and thus losing connection with others, and also a time when girls, gaining voice and knowledge, are in danger of knowing the unseen and speaking the unspoken and thus losing connection with what is commonly taken to be reality. This crisis of connection in girls' lives at adolescence links the psychology of women with the most basic questions about the nature of relationships and the definition of reality. Girls' questions about relationships and reality, however, also tug at women's silences. (Gilligan, 1990, p.25)

As an educator, girls' questions and lived stories tug at my silences. I support Lyons' (1990) thinking that as educators we need to better understand our learner's goals, interests and learning contexts. In order to do this, "we must listen". My attention is drawn to girls' thoughts "about what is morally necessary". These thoughts illuminate and help me to "understand how morality, mind, self, and relationships are intricately linked in everyday ways of knowing and learning" (Lyons, 1990, p.69). What is missed in the silence? There is a need to create spaces for girls' voices to be expressed, heard, and valued within their gendered worlds.

I am hopeful that as we release ourselves from ideologies such as the mystique of domesticity, myths about motherhood, chastity, passivity, and beauty we will hear girls speaking and imagining distinctive ways of being in the world. Perhaps, this will allow multiple ways of seeing, feeling, and thinking, so that female and male development may be depicted by arranging themes that pertain to the experience of one's body, to the relationships with others, and to living within a family and a culture (Gilligan, 1990).

## Claiming an education

> At the root of the problem of awakening women students is a recognition of the central validity of their own perceptions in choosing and interpreting their education. In order for the oppressed to be liberated, according to Friere, their experiences under the oppressors must be raised to the level of personal consciousness, recognized and affirmed. Then teachers and students can be equals in a cooperative search for understanding about the experiences of people in their world.
>
> Maher, 1985, p.32

## The lived curriculum

> We learn that we are wrong: we become educated.
>
> Spender, 1982, p.34

By now I am well versed in the critique of our learning institutions whether it be museums, libraries, universities, schools or other 'places of learning'. Most of these institutions continue to be male-defined; purveying androcentric theories and perpetuating in their structure, the power and privilege to differentiate between gender, race and class (Spender, 1981, 1982; Hall, 1982; Maher, 1985; Belenky, et, al, 1986; Heilbrun, 1988; Gilligan, 1990; and Bateson, 1990). Fortunately, feminist teachers and scholars have questioned our structures, our curricula, and our pedagogical practices of our institutions (for example, Rich, 1979; Tarule, 1980; Abrams 1981; Spender, 1982; Nemiroff, 1989; Gaskell et al, 1989; Taylor, 1989; Lyons, 1990). Perhaps, their critiques serve as starting points for women's and girls' education, that is, concerns to support what is missing.

Curriculum can be conceived as a source of a variety of vantage points. I will use the definition of curriculum offered by Connelly and Clandinin (1988) that stresses "experience" and "situation". Curriculum can become one's life course of action. For myself, it has become a path of lived experience, "a process of living out the stories we tell ourselves in order to make meaning of our experience" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

A host of images and faces flit across my mind like a kaleidoscope, images and emotions of looking at students' faces; those who were silent, and those who spoke. I was always dutiful in going to school. That did not mean I attended all my classes. When I was interested or felt a sense of purpose I read, wrote, listened, created, and searched ideas. But often I lived with a sense of alienation in the classroom. By the time I reached high school I began to "skip" a lot of those alienating classes. I was "hanging out" with my friends at our neighboring park or the parking lot. My intention was not to 'misbehave', or 'get attention', or 'look for trouble'. I was simply disinterested. Perhaps, I was indifferent to the happenings in many of my classes. I did remove myself regularly and lengthily from classroom life. I opted out early in sciences and mathematics. It was not until I began writing and telling my lived school experiences that I gained a sense of how my "personal practical knowledge" (Clandinin, 1986) reflected my prior knowledge. Personal practical

knowledge is carved out of, and shaped by, situations; it is knowledge that is constructed and reconstructed as we live out our stories and retell and relive them through processes of reflection (Clandinin, 1990, p.2).

Looking back at my lived experiences of school life I struggled to find a language in which to speak and a space in which to express what was on my mind. I can still see work sheets, text books, and learning kits, which I filled in and was then tested on. Even then I felt most of it was gibberish. I was made to memorize "it" and then believe "it". Many of my memories of classrooms are ones of "fragmentation" - a process of removing the essence from its being, the taking of freedom, the draining of my will to learn that left me with little sense of purpose. My sense of "being" in school was often one of demystification or what Greene (1974) terms as powerlessness. Being silenced has meant that many of my schooling stories have been expressed by cynicism, privatism, and a loss of trust tinged with despair (Greene, 1974).

As I retell my lived experiences of school, I think about what I learned and what I failed to learn. I wonder how my feelings of alienation and fragmentation might be lived out by other girls today. My own feelings of alienation led to a lack of "centeredness" as a learner, a sense of fragmentation and exclusion. Crucial to being centered is freedom, a feeling of being whole from the inside to outside which allows for a "heightened perspective of oneself and others" (Pinar, 1976, p.13). Thus, I care deeply about what some have referred to as a curriculum that is not "intended for her", one that excludes women and girls. I wonder when more attention will address the feminine interests. How will we respond to the emotional and attitudinal questions that girls pose? As an educator, I continue to be troubled by what I have lived and still see continuing in traditional classrooms, a lingering atmosphere of alienation creating "chilly climates" (Hall, 1982).

My wakefulness evokes a way to describe how my life was lived in the classroom. The things that happened in the classroom did not necessarily overwhelm me. They were "the feelings inside me, beneath my skin, behind my ribs, within my skull" (Dillard, 1987, p.22) that left me with little sense of purpose that connected with the prescribed curriculum which was

provided for me inside and outside of school life. Now I try to imagine ways to bring forth a curriculum that evokes a sense of wholeness, a curriculum that is alive, connected, and authentic for both the student and the teacher. What is an authentic connection for girls? I conceive curriculum in terms of possibility for individuals, all kinds of individuals. I conceive of curriculum as offering varied perspectives through which all kinds of people can view their own lived worlds. Curriculum provides opportunities for them to see that they themselves, whoever they are, constitute those worlds as self determining human beings (Greene, 1974). I have come to see that my responsibility, as an educator, is to enable students to understand that they can take action by increasing their awareness; by constructing meaning for their future lives.

Teaching

> I now care about my thinking and think about what
> I care about -- about lives and what endangers them.
>
> Ruddick, 1984

When I speak of "teaching" I do not necessarily mean school teaching. There are many 'places of learning' that exist outside of traditional school environments.

There have been times as a mother and as a woman teaching girls that I have arrived at moments of my own resistance in the learning relationship. I have experienced my own solutions, to the problems of self in relation, similar to those of many girls. I continue to encounter my own reluctance to know what I know. This knowledge is contained in my body. I have come to understand my need to be authentic, not to fake, the necessity for me to model the hidden stories of my lived experience in order to teach our daughters. I have done this in part to hide my imperfection, but also to keep girls from my feelings of sadness and anger. It has been through teaching girls and mothering a daughter that I have discovered that I am harboring within myself "a girl who lives in her body, who is insistent on speaking, who intensely desires

relationships and knowledge, and who, perhaps at the time of adolescence, went underground or was overwhelmed" (Gilligan, 1990). This leads me to question the deprivation of freedom when girls are protected from "knowledge of darkness, ambiguity, and complexity and what happens when they are not allowed to test themselves against often dangerous actualities" (Greene, 1988, p.77).

In the process of sorting out the pieces of my life and searching for my unique and authentic voice I have come to believe, "all knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known." (Belenky et al, 1986, p.137) As I challenge myself and girls to name the dilemmas that block our achievement, I think about the sharing that occurs in the process of "connected teaching". (Belenky, et al, 1986; Grumet, 1988; Greene, 1988; Bell, 1989). Connected teachers are believers who trust their students' thinking and encourage them to expand it. Being a "teacher means engaging learners, who seeks to involve each person wholly -- mind, sense of self, sense of humor, range of interests, interactions with other people -- in learning" (Duckworth, 1986, p.490). Connected teachers work to gain access to other people's knowledge. As I try to share experiences from other people's ideas, I have seen the need for empathy. Empathy as Noddings wrote (1984) "does not involve projection but reception" (in Belenky, et al, 1986, p.122). I work not to project but to receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other.

I am the teaching. I have learned to see myself as an "instrument of understanding" (Belenky, et al, 1986, p.141). In this sense, teachers are more than they do. They are the teaching. Becoming and staying aware of connected teaching means that I am ever watchful and thoughtful by teaching authentically. I am mindful of my doing and being, my thoughts and soul are embodied in oneness of the lived moment (Aoki, 1991).

It is my understanding that knowledge is constituted in lived experiences of the world (Pinar, 1976). In order to understand what it means to live an educated life, I look closely at what occurs both inside and outside of schools. I listen deeply to the personal practical knowledge and narratives of experience that fall within my guidance as I "give back children's stories in ways that are educative" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p.197). I continue to ask questions that are reshaped

again and again through the restorying of my life. I learn from being a learner. As a reflective learner I see an importance to study women in relationship with girls and the importance of girls sharing experiences with each other. Through the collective consciousness, I see the creation of a holistic curriculum that will challenge the fate of our lives since we are educated by many teachers both in and out of school.

## CHAPTER THREE

## Creating re-presentations: Constructing my research

What if no one's watching

by Ani DeFranco, 1992

if my life were a movie
there would be a sunset
and the camera would pan away
but the sky is just a little sister
tagging along behind the buildings
trying to imitate their grey
the little boys are breaking bottles
against the sidewalk
the big boys too
the girls are hanging out at the candy store
pumping quarters into the phone
because they don't want to go home

i think what
what if no one's watching
what if when we're dead
we are just dead
i mean what
what if god ain't looking down
what if he's looking up instead

if my life were a movie
i would light a cigarette
and the smoke would curl
around my face
everything i do would be interesting
i'd play the good guy
in every scene
but i always feel i have to
take a stand
and there's always someone on hand
to hate me for standing there
i always feel i have to open my mouth
and every time i do
i offend someone somewhere

but what
what if no one's watching
what if when we're dead
we are just dead
what if there's no time to lose
what if there's things we gotta do
things that need to be said

you know i can't apologize
for everything i know
i mean you don't have to agree with me
but once you get me going
you better just let me go
we have to be able to criticize
what we love
to say what we have to say
'cause if you're not trying
to make something better
then as far as i'm concerned
you are just in the way

i mean what
what if no one's watching
what if when we're dead
we are just dead
i mean what
what if it's just us down here
what if god is just an idea
someone put in your head

I have been writing for a year since completing my proposal for this study. I have constructed this work around conversations with Amber, Mellisa, Karen, and Harmony and photographs of their lived worlds. I was supported at the University of Alberta while doing my master's work by a Province of Alberta Graduate Scholarship. Because my work was nested within another study funded by the Alberta Advisory Committee for Educational Studies (AACES) all of our taped conversations were transcribed, cameras were purchased, and the girls' film was developed.

Experience is messy and so is experiential research. I have learned to follow leads in a variety of directions as I attempted to hold them all in the inquiry context as my work proceeded. As I listened and re-listened, read and re-read, looked and looked again I began to wonder how I would ever pull together the "seemingly endless continuum of events and stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p.12).

## Self as researcher

> She has become braver as she has aged, less interested in the opinions of those she does not cherish, and has come to realize that she has little to lose, little, any longer to risk.
>
> Heilbrun, 1988, p.123

> A dubious project, when feminists build their theory using the master's tools: What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable.
>
> Lorde, 1988, p.98

I live my life negotiating, constantly mediating spaces between my personal and public life. As a woman I am continually organizing and reflecting on the ways I live my individual life in relation to my collective concerns. My understandings come from my lived experiences, relationships, and connections that emphasize the importance of women's/girls' individual and shared experience and our struggles.

I studied my space as a researcher. I found no ease in this position. I questioned myself and revisited the conversations, which I had with the girls, frequently. Who I was/am and why I do what I do. I have discovered and restoried the realities of my life making it possible to learn and unlearn. My thesis work is a way for me to negotiate new and multiple understandings. From my position of using feminist theory informed by Spender, 1980 & 1982; Heilbrun 1988; Le Guin, 1989; Lorde, 1981; hooks, 1984, I have found the need to articulate what our practical activity has already appropriated in our lived worlds. Heilbrun (1988) wrote:

> I do not believe that new stories will find their way into texts if they do not begin in oral exchanges among women in groups hearing and talking to one another. As long as women are isolated from the other, not allowed to offer other women the most personal accounts of their lives, they will not be part of any narrative of their own. (p.46)

This narrative construction is a way for me to articulate what I know from my practical activity, a way to bring out and to make conscious

the epistemologies embedded within my life. This is a way for me to question, to seek out and to create alternative stories. As a woman, I have learned to anticipate the unexpected, and I have learned to encourage diversity by living through talking and reading collectively about women's ambitions, possibilities, and accomplishments.

Writing this thesis has been a fragmented, interrupted, and often an exhausting experience. This has not been linear work, there is no beginning, middle, or end. It has become a weaving of negotiations between my private and public life. My life has become a research process. I know this inquiry has been possible with time. Time to learn and unlearn how I look and listen. Drawing on collaboration in a community in which to discuss my work in a collective process rather than individually, alone in my thinking. Time to think, write, take photographs. Time to reflect on my experiences. Time of privilege. Love within a community of caring people. Over the past months, years, I have come to different understandings of how I make sense of the spaces I occupy; how I survey myself differently; how I live my life.

I struggled to place Chloé in fulltime care while I did this work. I experienced pangs of mother guilt. I settled on three days a week and added two months of fulltime care in order to create some continuity. The pace of my writing was sporadic. Writing and creating stories has been labor intensive. As much as I loved it at times I was overwhelmed. As a learner I found myself awakened daily to a world of multiple meanings. This also became overwhelming. Did I know enough? Did I have the right data? The questioning of self seemed endless. As I continue to make sense of the meanings associated with constructs and concepts, I am left with questions, uncertainty, and no definite conclusions. What language do I use? Who am I to question social legitimations -- those fundamental structures that are held in esteem by the dominant culture? How do I bend the rules, create and imagine other possibilities for living my life? How do I live my life in relation to the girls in this study? What does it means to transform words and photographs of lived experiences into language?

I understand research through the many ways I experience my knowing and my ways of living life by reliving and retelling stories of my

experiences. Stories are nested within stories. The temporal duration of stories changes over time and space as they are told and retold. Constructing this narrative brings a set of values, cultural, and political meanings which are critical aspects to understanding this narrative. As I make meaning and name my research, I live out stories, tell stories of those experiences, and modify them through retelling and reliving them (Connelly & Clandinin, 1992). Restorying my experiences is to celebrate times of connection since I found power in retelling my silences. My layers of understandings draws upon a variety of meanings, a pluralistic way of being, a way to acquire richer understandings.

At times this narrative has been an emotional construction. Some of my "awakenings" were mysterious and messy -- opening conflicts within myself. My tensions arose in the act of researching who I am. In no way do I want to achieve agreement on the messiness of personal meanings. I questioned what I did and why I engaged in this work with girls. How will my re-presentations of them be read? How will each reader read my text?

I read theoretical work such as relational theory (Brown & Gilligan, 1992) and ways of knowing (Belenky & Clinchy & Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) as I brought together multiple ways of being in the world. In creating my re-presentations I have attempted to make room for the idiosyncrasies, vulnerabilities, and ambivalences I bring to the research conversation. Throughout this inquiry process I have named, interpreted, and translated my experiences as part of the inquiry process. A large part of my struggle in writing had to do with myself as researcher and my relations with the text based on the field experiences. Clandinin & Connelly (1992) helped to make sense of my struggle:

> Questions of telling, that is of the research account, come down to matters of autobiographical presence and the significance of this presence for the text and for the field. Matters of signature and voice are important. (p.12)

I found researching and writing my stories of the girls' lived experiences remarkably challenging. I am still discovering the nature and scope of the particulars by exploring what kinds of stories we are able to create. My narrative study was built on a process of growth "spinning

backward and forward" building upon constructions and reconstructions of "personal practical" knowledge as I story and restory my life (Clandinin, 1992).

As I constructed and reconstructed the research story and I learned that telling and retelling stories is a way for me to inquire into who I am in relation to my lived experiences. My thesis work has been my discovery of me. The girls' stories have been a gift which I will always cherish. I listened to my voice in our taped conversations and I have discovered who I am in relation to girls' told stories. Stories that paralleled mine were easier to hear and understand. Hearing the stories of what I saw as my difference from them was challenging. I learned and I am still learning to listen to girls' talk. I heard my voice and how I silenced, missed, or did not respond to many of the girls' stories, especially many of the "you know" stories. There were times when I did not get past my own dilemma of who I was as a researcher. There were days when I was tired and not feeling strong; times I struggled to maintain a sense of whole. For example, with Harmony my position of researcher and the possibility of placing her in the middle of relationships was not resolved until December 1992, when I finally had the courage to ask her to respond to my account. My re-presentation with Amber did not result in a sense of who Amber is as a girl, but rather my story focused on one aspect of her life, that of living in two worlds. Hearing Amber's stories raised my awareness of my own racist attitudes. These awakenings will enable me to grow as I confront these tensions.

I continue to ask myself what does it mean to interpret girls' lived experiences and to construct re-presentations of their worlds. This construction is an evolving work, a way for me, to make sense of what I hear and see. This is how I am making sense of my work at this point in time.

## Negotiating our lives as women and girls within school

Chloé rides her bike up the ramp. We are in the education building. She is happy to be with me, here in the academy, where I study. I love being here. Chloé rides her red tricycle down the long hallway. We

recognize some 'regular' people among the classroom crowds who mingle in the hallway. Some smile and say hello. I like to see the 'regulars', the familiar people. Chloé is uncertain about the numbers of "big" people who congregate around classroom doorways. We hear them talking, mulling over marks, readings, and their teachers. I remember doing that too, and I still do. This morning, however, I am checking my mailbox, still looking for my ethics review. It takes so long. As Chloé pedals towards the elevator doors, she rides cautiously aboard the elevator. She reminds me of her discomfort with "too many people" in the elevator. I suggest we wait for the next one. Yet I am pressed for time and wish the crowd didn't bother her. I respect her discomfort. My mail box is empty. I am disturbed by the length of time it takes. It is nearly five weeks. On the ride down in the elevator, a distinguished person in the hierarchy of the academy tells us, "You know bikes aren't allowed in the building." I think to myself, "Oh, how unreal". I imagine the making of this kind of rule, the people who made this rule? No children's bikes in the education building. "No", I thought, "he must be kidding, this is his idea of a joke". I smile and chuckle. His eyes tell me a different story. Another man on the elevator interjects by saying, "Ya, too bad, but hers is a trike." I laugh. Chloé gave me a solemn gaze. She did not laugh with these big people. (Journal, 91-05)

As we got off the elevator I thought about the power of making such a rule. Is there really such a rule? As Chloé and I prepared to go home she asks, "Is that true, what that man said?" "True?" I wonder. "Well no", I tell her, "but if it was true it was sort of a weird rule". "After all", I remind her "wheelchairs can come in the building". I think about those who make the rules in this "last and best-protected residence of patriarchal hegemony, this place that defines correct ideas and correct ways of thinking. It does not tolerate criticism. Childbirth is by doctors, divorce by lawyers, and teaching by tenured educators. Knowledge, in this contemporary social order, comes from researchers'" (Drummond, 1983, p.46).

Conversations

Over the past eighteen months I have engaged in narrative study to "hear deeply" (Daly, 1978) the stories of four girls' lives. I was attentive to their voices. In attempting to create a space that sustained the girls' authentic voices and to hear their stories by emphasizing connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate (Belenky, et al, 1986). I attempted to bring to the surface girls' potential to create, absorb, and produce possibility to directly legitimate their personal and social reality.

This narrative study took place in a large multicultural, middle class urban elementary school (K-6) and a high school (7-12). My master's work has been constructed as part of a larger study. We/I met the girls on a monthly basis from September, 1991 to December, 1992 (Bach & Clandinin & Greggs, 1993, p.6). When we began Amber, Mellisa and Karen were in grade seven, and have now moved into grade eight. Harmony was in grade six and has moved to grade seven. The girls' names have been changed. For these girls, the end of grade six marked "a move to high school from a small school to a much larger school; from one teacher to many teachers; from one classroom to lockers" (Bach, Clandinin, & Greggs, 1993, p.6).

All our conversations took place in a school setting in which we shared stories of lived experiences. The conversations were a social interaction in which we constructed our reality. By honoring and sharing myself with the girls there was a "joint living out" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) of both the girls' narratives and my narrative as researcher. Through our conversations I began to see girls living their stories in an ongoing experiential text as they told their stories in words and pictures and as they reflected upon their lives in our conversations. I saw the growth of these girls' futures as they shared their stories and lived them since "as a researcher we are always engaged in living, telling, reliving, and retelling our own stories" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p.13).

Our research connection was defined within our monthly meeting in an interview room. It was a simple room -- a teacher preparation room,

with a table, chairs, bookshelves and large windows. All of our conversations were audiotaped and then transcribed. In May of 1991 cameras were purchased for each girl and they were asked to photograph people and events in their lives inside and outside of school. I discuss the photography process in an upcoming section.

This research process was not univocal. None of my work was done alone. My work is based on "longthinks", relying and thriving on collaboration. Collaborating with Jean Clandinin, Kathy Cairns and Robin Greggs meant I was aware of a set of rules and assumptions in our work. From my experience of collaborative work I felt an agreement with these assumptions -- an understanding that comes from the connections made out of the lived experience, telling stories, and having those stories validated. I shared friendships with these women and a "wonderful energy of work in the public sphere." (Heilbrun, 1988, p.108)

Since our work took place in another city I was often able to drive with Jean for three hours. A time that I longed for as we made sense of our work. I valued my time with Jean to talk with and put forward my tentative thoughts....I loved it!

Throughout the time of conducting our conversations, I imagined pictures of new possibilities, different realities, and experiences. Doing this study has meant discovering and understanding myself in relation to the girls' lives. Listening and hearing the voices of girls evoked emotion an immense desire to see that girls' voices are heard; in changing how they live inside and outside of the classroom.

## Relationships with the girls

As a narrative researcher I continue to retell and relive my stories as I undergo new experiences in relation to hearing the voices and seeing the photographs of the girls. My work attempts to encompass the experiences of four girls, Amber, Mellisa, Karen, and Harmony. Implicit in my narrative inquiry is the assumption that rooted in experience there are multiple ways of telling our stories, and that each form of re-presentation has constraints and possibilities. I attempt to resist general principles that account for the universal experience of

women's/girls' lives. Since experience, "is the stories people live. People live stories, and in telling of them reaffirm them, modify them and create new ones" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p.7).

As I construct my knowing, being mindful and thoughtful of my responsibility for teaching girls about relationships, about speaking, about conflict, about difference and about political and psychological resistance, I acknowledge I have shaped the ways in which these girls live out their lives both in and out of the classroom. I have asked myself repeatedly what strengthens girls' engagement, effort, growth, and courage in the world? Who decides? What voices do we hear? How do I acknowledge girls have something to say? Looking closely at my own intentions for doing this research I have come to see and hear the deeply embedded contradictions inherent in creating new stories. Creating new stories is and continues to be difficult work.

Being with girls led me to consider what would happen if I "woke" them up to new understandings? Could I awaken them? Should I? Who was I in the lives of these girls? Each girl told me on numerous occasions that she "loved to talk", "liked coming to see me", and that they "appreciated having someone who listened". The girls rarely missed my visits. Harmony missed two due to a death in her family. I always felt welcomed by the girls. Throughout the study there was mutual sharing of emotions and personal knowledge, as well as a respect for the girls' conversational space. This differs from patterns of talk which more sharply distinguish a traditional researcher and subject relationship.

As I listened and re-listened to the tapes of our conversations, I began to see and feel the power of being heard and understood. As I listened to the tapes and re-read transcripts of talk, I heard myself as a supportive listener with ongoing responses like "Mm Hm" or "Yeah". I also remained aware of my nonverbal responses of head nods, smiles and laughter. These responses sustained our conversations. As well, I believe they provided a sense of comfort, and perhaps, even validation.

Some of our talk seemed a sort of formal turn-taking and other parts gave way to the girls' participation. Usually the girls wanted to talk. Often I would have to end our conversations. Throughout the study I attempted to make sure that our talk was not characterized by

hierarchical positioning, objectification or exploitation of the girls. I did not see the girls as subjects or objects but rather as friends. I came to the conversations open to topics the girls chose. I had no set of scripted questions. I valued all conversation. I valued our time together. I was reminded of the words of Woolf (1929):

> But it is obvious that the values of women differ very often from the values which have been made by the other sex; naturally, this is so. Yet it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are 'important'; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes 'trivial'. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to fiction. (p.70)

I never trivialize or downgrade women's/girls' talk. Talk about friends, teachers, family, pets, and what Woolf called the trivial, clothes, make-up, and the weather were the stories we shared. Being with each girl on a one to one basis was wonderful. I felt this was a special time for each girl, time alone with an attentive woman. Often I found myself thinking about Chloé during our talks, hoping that someday she too would meet women to hear deeply her lived experiences.

I struggle to put words to many of my lived experiences - especially in the written word. I have been fortunate to experience the writing of my inquiry with the support of many caring women. I am clearly not alone in my growth as a woman, writer, and scholar. So I think hard about the lived experiences the girls share with me. What are their silences? What is my position of privilege and power as researcher? Will I ever really know and understand how the girls will feel inside themselves? How might they feel about my interpretations in my written story?

As a woman researcher in narrative inquiry, I have experienced the process and feelings associated with having my lived experiences interpreted. I have experienced some uneasiness in the process of reading an interpretative text of my own lived experience. Just as my stories have been returned with respect for the person I am, I trust the girls will have similar feelings since we have built a relationship of trust. In our relationship of trust that has been built over time I have made sure the girls know I am writing stories of their lived experiences for my thesis work. The girls know I am the person who is writing the

stories. I was clear in our conversations and attempted to create a non-hierarchical atmosphere. There were no secrets. No surprise interpretations since I told each girl what I was writing about and what photographs would be included. Throughout the research process I shared my tentative thoughts, values, and judgments in safe places where we valued and respected each other's stories. I see the girls' lived experiences as gifts. Receiving their gifts made me think hard about our relationship and how the girls may feel when I return their stories. I look forward to sharing my stories with them.

Learning to listen to girls' talk

"You know." Harmony says. I do. I think. I know my story. I do not really know her story. When Harmony and the other girls say "you know", I heard their words but I was silent. I hesitate to respond. Feeling their direct gaze, I was reluctant to enter their "you know" stories. Who am I as researcher? Who am I in the conversations? I always attempted to give my best understanding, to actively hear what the girls were telling me, but there were times of self doubt. Times of feeling tired, intimidated, and powerless. Learning to listen, to truly hear and understand what was said were skills I was developing and continue to develop. Often I wanted to probe or ask more, yet, I would stop myself by asking why do I need to know. To what end? What does a girl need to know?

> Does she not, as a self-conscious, self-defining human being, need knowledge of her own history, her much politicized biology, an awareness of the creative work of women of the past, the skills and crafts and techniques and powers exercised by women in different times and cultures, a knowledge of women's rebellions and organized movements against our oppression and how they have been routed and diminished? Without such knowledge women live and lived with context, vulnerable to the projections of male fantasy, male prescriptions for us, estranged from our own experience because our education has not reflected or echoed it. I would suggest that not biology, but ignorance of our selves, has been the key to our powerlessness. (Rich, 1979, p.240)

These girls have lived for eleven, twelve, and thirteen years. They live diverse lives. These girls are daughters, sisters and friends who talk about their private and public lives. I had gained a sense of connection with these girls, yet, when they said "you know" I stayed silent -- voiceless -- wondering what do I tell them? What is my responsibility as a woman? These were and continue to be my dilemmas. All of our "promise not to tell" stories are 'off the record'. Hearing and seeing the girls brought forward images and stories of myself making it hard at times to hear their words. I was thankful our conversations were taped. There were parts of me that did not want to hear similar stories to those I lived twenty years ago. I was saddened to hear the girls' stories of being silenced, of being dismissed, and of being ignored. I questioned my knowledge, my own texts, my unarticulated needs and expectations, my unconscious desires for girls'/women's lives, my attitudes, opinions, emotions, and relationships. I was asking: How do I live out my life? How will I research/teach? How will I study the lives of girls? How will I retell -- re-present the narratives of lived experience? Whose voice is re-presented? What voices do I hear? How do I acknowledge girls have something to say? How do I act on it? What are the stories do I create?

Still Photography

> I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say in any other way - things that I had no words for.
>
> O'Keeffe, in Robinson, 1989, p.165

Being a visual artist means I am a maker of form. I see photography as functioning as an "active participant and tool for inquiry in the social dialogue and construction" (Tucker & Dempsey, 1990, p.8) in this narrative inquiry. I attempted to provide the girls and myself with the skills and conceptual tools to read and express our experiences of our world (Padellford & Choi, 1988; New, 1978). One way is through the use of photography. Photography does not primarily seek to validate the

status quo, but to pose questions for "purposes of social melioration and transformation" (Rosler, 1989, p.35), not merely for cultural reproduction. I see photography as offering opportunities for wider communication of the personal and political lives of myself and the girls. Photographs, unlike paintings or drawings, capture rather than interpret a moment in time and experience (Green, 1983; Collier, 1986). Using photography emphasizes the descriptions and portrayals of the lived worlds I am studying (Farrar & Straus & Giroux, 1978; Hall-Duncan, 1979; Liberman, 1979; Harrison, 1987). Since I had no intention of seeing myself as a neutral participant in this inquiry process, photographs provided possibility of building a deeper rapport. I see photography as a way to slow down life images, so that we can make sense of those images in different ways over time. Photographs have the potential to transform lived experience. Iversen (1983) convinces me further to explore the use of photography in the research process:

> Photography can convey many things in women's lives which are not usually seen.... Photographs can be a stepping stone to enlarging our experience, introducing new ways of seeing. As women in a patriarchal culture, it is critical that we think critically about the interconnections between photographic imagery and life experience. It is crucial to understand our underlying assumptions, motives and attitudes as photographers. It s crucial that we realize our power in being able to make our own images. (p.1)

We live in a visual world. An often unknown world. Therefore another rationale for the adoption of photography was that for artistic practice to have an effect upon the social order, it should speak with a language of that order (Mansell, 1990). I believe society encourages girls to be passive, to be consumers, rather than creators. But I visualize these girls as movers, doers, and creators. I wanted to provide a chance for the girls to control and move away from the dominant images created about their lives as girls. We are not pages from the magazines. Providing the girls with cameras was a way to re-create lived experiences.

## Collecting the girls' photographs

> Nothing is ever the same as they said it was. It's what I've never seen before that I recognize.
>
> Arbus, 1972, p.ix

On May 8, 1991, I provided the girls with cameras, with thanks to a funding source for this research project. I was so excited. Although I had prepared a set of instructions on how to use the camera for the girls, I was unable to use them as planned. On this particular Friday, Harmony was going out of town, and with her mother's support, she was able to slip in to collect her camera before flying off to Toronto. Mellisa and Karen were in a musical play and were practising in the gym all day. I was able to drop off their cameras. I was able to talk with Amber since her classes were scheduled as usual. Handing out the cameras was different than I had planned. Everything worked out. The instant cameras were simple to operate. The girls figured them out.

The girls knew of my interests in photography. In earlier conversations I told them that they would be receiving their own cameras to take pictures of their worlds inside and outside of school. I was supported by the school adminstration and the girls' parents. The girls were given two weeks to take pictures. After the two weeks I went back to the school office and collected all the cameras and had their work processed.

I returned with the research team in June for my last conversations for my study. I had double prints made so each girl had her own set. I had written prior reflections on the girls' photographs in preparation for hearing their stories about each of their photographs. My reflections are included in the re-presentations in Chapter Four.

Collecting the girls' photographs meant I came face to face with the reality of the theory of the flesh. I saw things that I had not heard. Seeing the girls' photographs of their lived worlds meant I wrestled with questions of: How will I interpret the photograph? How will I re-present their lived experiences? What is my relationship with and story of the photograph? What does it depict for the girls? What message do I read

from the photograph? Are the pictures posed? Will the girls' stories correspond to the picture? The words of Arbus (1972) help me to make sense of the girls and my photographs:

> Everybody has that thing where they need to look one way but they come out looking another way and that's what people observe. You see someone on the street and essentially what you notice about them is the flaw. It's just extraordinary that we should have been given these peculiarities. And, not content with what we were given, we create a whole other set. Our guise is like giving a sign to the world to think of us in a certain way but there's a point between what you want people to know about you and what you can't help people knowing about you. And that has to do with what I've always called the gap between intention and effect. I mean if you scrutinize reality closely enough, if in some way you really, really get to it, it becomes fantastic. You know it really is totally fantastic that we look like this and you sometimes see that very clearly in a photograph. Something is ironic in the world and it has to do with the fact that what you intend never comes out like you intended it. (p.2)

Once the photographs were developed, I invited the girls to respond to their photographs. I asked questions about the told each story around each of the photographs. Some of the questions asked about their photographs were: Which photographs were their favorites and why? What did they see? Did they have a goal? Did they have a style that they wanted to duplicate? Did they communicate the idea they had planned for? Through this process, I hoped, as Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state, "by answering the researcher's question, the participants were able to penetrate more deeply to other experiences to trace the emotionality attached to their particular way of storying events and this, from the point of view of research, also constitutes data" (p.5).

Collecting photographs enhanced my knowing and gave hints to learning to see and hear the spaces the girls are involved with inside and outside of school. It was another way to see how the girls compose their lives. Many of the photographs were of favorite times, memories, pets and family around which they constructed stories. With the assistance of the girls and graduate students I selected the photographs which I have included in the re-presentations in Chapter Four. The photographs are texts created to represent aspects of field experience.

I have selected the field experiences I want to share (Connelly & Clandinin, 1992, p.15).

Self as photographer

> Deals mainly with forbidding as does religion.... [Since our] recorded history begins in the patriarchal period, it is its ethic alone which we know.
>
> Gilman, 1911, p.133

Taking pictures was demanding. Carrying my camera was no problem. During this study I carried my camera daily for two weeks. I became comfortable carrying my camera. I thought about what each picture meant. I knew I was creating the reality of the photograph. Who was I in front of the lens? How will I take photographs of people's lives? Do I ask them? What desires am I promoting? Who owns the photograph? What if I capture them in public places? What is informed consent? What are the politics of photographic truth?

One day I went to West Edmonton mall. I was aware of the tourists, the number of photographs they take, and who gets in the way of the camcorders. I gave myself permission to snap away as a tourist. Putting on this guise made taking pictures relaxing and fun. There was a lot of background noise making it easy for me to turn to the visual. Capturing shots of people in public places differed from private places. Holding up the camera was easiest in public when I was with Chloé and Steve. Being connected with people gave me a sense of consent. Taking photographs of objects is different from taking photographs of people. Who was I in public "shooting away"? What is informed consent in a public place? Is it as simple as saying "excuse me but may I take your picture"? How did I get the picture? What lens did I use? Am I prepared for people to take pictures of me when I do not know? What about choice in taking photographs? What are the ethics involved in taking photographs? These were and continue to be my thoughts and wonders on taking photographs.

My research is nested within an "ethic of caring" (Noddings, 1984), authenticity, and responsibility, all of which are politically bound. Like Noddings, care for me entails "generous thinking" and "receptive

rationality" in an effort to institute, maintain, or reestablish natural caring (1986, p.497). Through this narrative inquiry I am retelling stories and showing photographs of my lived experiences. They become part of a public discourse. As I share my narratives of experience "for the record", I ask myself what happens as I connect my narrative threads of growing up in a western Canadian culture with stories of my experiences in life? In school? In marriage? In mothering? I think hard about those who "see" and "hear" girls' and women's stories? How will our words and images be read by the reader? Who "ought" to see and listen? As girls and women continue to break the silence of our lives and to create safe public spaces in which to tell our stories, we will create a world that describes and explains human life from multiple perspectives. It is my hope that these become part of the cultural stories to be passed on to the next generation.

# PART II

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Re-presenting constructions: Narratives of experience

> We need a woman's language, a language of experience. And this must necessarily come from our exploration of the personal, the everyday, and what we experience -- women's lived experience.
>
> Stanley & Wise, 1983, p.146

Listening to girls' voices was complex. Analyzing and reflecting upon the girls' conversations and photographic work was awe-inspiring. There were moments I struggled showing these four girls with assertiveness or mischief -- her spice rather than her sugar. From my jottings, journal fragments, field notes, quick breaths between deeper ponders and listening to and reading our taped conversations, I attempted to draw out a variety of meanings, a pluralistic way of being, in order to acquire understandings and skills that are purposeful to the living fabric of the home and classroom life.

The following re-presentations are stories and images that do not simply reflect social conditions. I was extra sensitive about how to portray them. The stories were selected, constructed, and purveyed within my research interests of "knowledge as narratively constructed, a moral, aesthetic, emotional and relational construction as we live and tell our stories of relationships with children, with each other, with self, with our worlds" (Bach, Clandinin, & Greggs, 1993, p.2). My initial analysis moved from a concern with the nature of images, the number, content, and stereotyping, to an exploration of culturally accepted structures and traditions which reflect my construction, perception, and study of the girls' lives.

The following re-presentations are stories. No one representation provides a complete account. The girls' narratives are presented in the order in which they were written. These constructions are articulated through the union of seeing, being seen, and being heard. The work is created with my present meanings and understandings. With the girls'

conversations and photographs I have attempted to encompass each of their lived experiences. I was/am mindful and thankful for the gifts Amber, Mellisa, Karen and Harmony have given me. Having the privilege of working with girls to create diverse visions of meaning, and spaces to tell our stories has shown me multiple threads of unseen patterns of living in a pluralistic culture.

Amber

Born: November 12, 1979
Nairobi, Kenya

Age: Twelve

Family: mother, father, two older brothers, a cat

Education: Grade seven. Bused to a gifted and talented education program in a large urban school since grade four.

Likes/Loves:

Animals
Children
Dancing - jazz, ballet, Indian dance
Talking/on the phone
Friends
Reading - loves classics/fantasy/marine biology
Writing
Travel
Shopping
routine
cooking
report cards/honor roll/high grades

## Amber: Living in two worlds

> I'm a great philosopher. I make up my own ways.
>
> Amber, December, 13, 1991

I met Amber in my second interview. One of the first things I noticed about Amber was her smile and her braces. She was blissful as she spoke in her strong voice. She talked with such confidence. Her shining long black hair and pure complexion were pleasing. At once I was captured by both her poise and her appearance. Amber talked of shopping and being a "clothes nut" (Conversation, 91-10-11). She was dressed in trendy clothes, a preppie style that was all the rage. Her surety as she spoke left me thinking about who and what gave her such a confident sense of being a girl. Amber is in a gifted and talented program and she was proud

to tell me this several times during our first conversation. With her pride came an appreciation of her good fortune as she told me "I find it a privilege for us to be here" (Conversation, 91-10-11). I was impressed with her ability to enter a conversation and talk about herself with such confidence.

Amber's presence and intelligence reminded me of my 'best friend' from my girlhood. I wanted to know as much as I could about her life, I was curious. I appreciated her curiosity in wanting to know about who I was. Her free flowing talk kept our conversation going by creating a space for me to tell her about some of my lived experience. I chuckled inside myself when she asked how old I was and complemented me. She asked if I was married, and if I had children. I was comfortable with her candidness. As well, Amber wanted to know about this study and what things we were hoping to find out by studying girls. I told her that there was little research done with girls and that the voices of girls' experiences inside and outside of school needed to be heard and written. She was intrigued and was willing to figure out some of these things with me. I was also clear about telling Amber that I was hoping to attain my master's degree from this work.

Listening to her stories made me drift back to my grade seven school days. I thought back on my days of being at the orthodontist and how, for me, braces changed my life. Seeing Amber wearing braces brought back a flood of memories. Feelings of being surveyed, the looks, stares, and questions on the faces of teachers and students brought back tensions from my story. Seeing and hearing Amber's stories tugged at my silences of being surveyed. As our conversation continued a disappointment grew inside of me. I felt envy. I wanted to have a part of what Amber had in her school curriculum when I was her age. Somewhere I had lost that strong voice that I had in school when I was her age. Seeing and hearing Amber stories I was reminded of how I wrestle to let go of the "schoolgirl" view (Walkerdine, 1990) I have held of myself for so long.

As we talked I felt her happiness. Her whole body sang. Several times she told me that she was a "very, very happy person" (Conversation,

91-10-11). I felt swept up in her ability to express herself verbally. Amber voiced her love of mathematics, science, and reading classic literature. All of those subjects had been foreign and of little interest to me when I was her age. Seeing and hearing her ability to articulate her strengths and reflect upon her life, left me uncertain. Yet, it was her enthusiasm and her lively talk that created our sense of connection. Amber was proud of her East Indian culture and her family life. She shared stories of coming to know who she was as a grade seven student with such a sense of ease. What I saw was a girl with a strong voice, with sophistication, and a sense of authenticity about who she was. I had to remind myself that Amber was just starting grade seven. As we sat in the cold interviewing room I thought back on my own life and who I was when I was in grade seven. The fact that I was not like Amber was both exciting and scary. I like her. At first, our only similarity was that we were the same sex. I knew almost nothing of her language, her East Indian traditions and her ethnic traditions. Her words and her gaze were strong and I knew I wanted to know more about her life.

Although I had no trouble connecting with Amber, I often felt self-conscious with who I was as researcher. This was a new space for me. What do I ask her? How far should I probe? And what does she think of me? I wanted to hear her stories since I have a daughter who I imagine will create different spaces for herself from those I had. Amber seemed to occupy such a positive space, I couldn't help but imagine Chloé. I was curious about anything Amber wanted to tell me. Our collaborative talks were open, I had no set agenda of questions to follow. Instead I followed her by listening deeply and trusting my curiosity. It was not always easy. By the end of our talks I felt tired.

As our conversation evolved over nine months, I heard Amber's stories of who she was in relation to her family, her deep respect for her mother, her caring for animals, children and her relationships with her East Indian community. However, it was not until I saw Amber's photographs that I began to make some real sense of her lived world inside and outside of school. Her photographs clearly divided her East Indian culture from her stories of school where she lives in the dominant culture. Amber lives with the reality of living in two worlds.

Screening Photographs by Amber

#1 - Amber's name written in snow at school

#2 - Amber's name written in snow at school

#3 - Boys hiding in school hallway

#4 - Boy walking in school hallway

#5 - Homeroom life

#6 - Amber in school hallway with her best friend

#7 - Outdoor field day event

#8 - Outdoor field day event

#9 - Outdoor field day event

#10 - Outdoor field day event

#11 - Outdoor field day event

#12 - Cat sleeping on living room floor

#13 - Amber's mother in living room

#14 - Party with Amber's dance friends

#15 - Party with Amber's dance friends

#16 - Party with Amber's dance friends

#17 - Hallway at uncle's and aunt's house

#18 - Aunt at kitchen table

#19 - On trampoline with friend

#20 - Shopping with mother, aunt, cousin

My prior reflection

At the top of the bleachers sits a group of girls with one boy who seems like the center of attention. The boy gazes directly at the camera. The girls are looking at the boy. They are laughing. One girl is dumping the last of her bag of chips on the boy's head. The boy is wearing cleats. I have a sense of inclusion for Amber. And, yet I wonder, are these the friends that sustain her at school? Whose faces gather around the edges of Amber's school world? (Journal, 92-06-01)

Amber's story

A: And this is funny. This is my favorite picture (hah). What had happened was um, Ellis, he's in there, he was begging for me to take a picture of him all day and I said no, no, no, no and I was just putting it off, later, later. And then , what had happened is Alex bought him a bag of chips and he had taken them and flattened them so they were literally a sheet. And she had also bought him a long

john so we thought that was really mean of him. And so then he had eaten some of the chips and we decided to eat the rest. And um, when we got kind of tired we said, somebody made a joke and said you should dump these on Ellis's head right. And we all sort of said, yeah and I said I'll take a picture. And so, it was really easy to get Ellis there. I just said um, I just said Ellis come on up, I'm taking a picture of everybody, do you want to be in it? He was really excited and said yeah, yeah. And he came and sat down and just as I took the picture, Alex dumped the chips on him. So (hah), it was pretty funny.

H: And what did he say?

A: He got, he was like, you can see he's smiling right now and he goes, what's that? (hah). But he was like, he was pretty upset but he forgave us. So. That's fine. You can see everybody freezing up there. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

I am surprised since I did not expect Amber to share an indoor family picture. At a conference I attended in March 1992 two women of Chilean and Chinese heritage respectively said that if they were Amber they would be ashamed to show a white woman the inside of their homes. This led me to wonder about my relationship with Amber. Who am I in relation to her, does she trust me - more or less? Here is Amber's mother in a sari. Her mother poses with her arms and hands folded in front. Her eyes are closed. There are four objects carefully placed on the television. On the left side sits the candle holder or statue. I wonder what it signifies? In the centre stands a statue which appears to be a brass person within a circle. Beside it is a small white clock. Off to the edge stands a glass vase with one yellow and two pink artificial roses. Above is a brass embossed framed painting of brass and silver flowers. I wonder if Amber struggles between her loyalty and identification with her East Indian community? In this space images speak of Amber's reality. (Journal, 92-06-01)

Amber's story

A: And this is my mother. This is before they're going out and this is like, she's wearing a sari and this is Indian God for a dance.

H: OK, good.

A: She's always closing her eyes. In all the pictures she has her eyes closed.

A: And this is still the living room.

H: OK. And this candle, is this a candle holder?

A: It's, well it's sort of, like during our festivals we put cottons on the ends, like on the ends there and there and there and there, and light fire in the end. And we put oil in the fire. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

An outdoor picture of Amber with her friend or cousin. They are jumping on a trampoline with water on it. It looks like they are having fun. Many girls tell stories of playing on a trampoline. I am not sure what Amber's shirt says. I do not know who is taking the picture. (Journal, 92-06-01)

Amber's story

A: And this is us again and we're jumping on the trampoline with water on it.

H: Yeah that looks like a hoot.

A: So (hah) her sister took the picture.

H: OK, so this is not at your house.

A: No, no this is at her house because we were jumping on the trampoline and we had sprayed water all over it. And it was really cold water at first so we had taken, taken like three pots and

filled it with hot water and poured it on. And we just kept on having to come and pour it on, and pour it on because it kept on cooling down. So (hah)

A: I was getting water all over me and I'm not a very watery type person so. (Conversation, 92-06-12).

My prior reflection

A group photo of Amber with two women and a young girl - extended family I would guess. Perhaps, they are downtown going shopping. They are looking at someone or something. Perhaps waiting for the rest of the group. Amber is wearing shorts and is holding a purse. I do not know who is taking the picture. (Journal, 92-06-01)

Amber's story

H: This isn't your grandma?

A: No, my grandmother is in India. But she's like a grandmother to me. Like she's always giving me things and talking to me.

H: I loved that [reflection above the woman's head]. I thought that was such a neat picture.

A: Yeah and this is in, where is this, in Esso plaza. So you'll be able to see just how much I interact in school and with my other friends and all. Like out of school with my Indian friends and that. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

## Re-presenting Amber's story

It is in Amber's last picture that I understand the power of photography to represent Amber's experiences. Like all artistic constructs, her photographs are incredibly complex. Her narrative told in stories and photographs, presented me with a complex insight of the reality that Amber lives in two worlds. All her photographs brought together for me how, as an East Indian girl, she lives in a world of tension, one intertwined with her East Indian culture and that of the dominant culture.

Contained in her photographs and stories are insights into the out-working [unlearning] of racism. Often I left our conversations questioning my relationship as a researcher of Dutch heritage to an East Indian participant. What would Amber be like with a researcher of East Indian heritage? I found no easy solution in how Amber represented her life in talk and in pictures. It has been with time and reflection, and with the support of living out the experiences of collaboration with other women and Amber, that I was able to see and hear more deeply the complexity of Amber's two worlds. Her photographs showed the division of her lived experience, thus giving me hints of understandings about her possible tensions. As freely as Amber talked of her cultural heritage I did not truly hear her stories until I saw her photographs. I connected her told stories to her photographs. This meant I could not hurry over and nullify this part of our research relationship. I was not always secure under the guise of who I was as a researcher. Analyzing Amber's photographs left me with feelings both of how she celebrates her culture, as well as fragmentation of being in a dominant school culture.

By hearing the stories and seeing the pictures of Amber's life inside and outside of school I reminded myself constantly: Who is doing the telling? In what context? For whom? To what end? I have been touched by Amber's ability to negotiate the tensions of being in two worlds. Through my time with Amber, the words and pictures seemed to point to reoccurring threads in her narrative of experience. Amber seems clear about her narrative threads of knowing who she is in relation to her East Indian culture and the dominant school culture.

As a woman I think a lot as I struggle, often in isolation, with meaningful resistance to consumerism, hedonism, narcissism, privatism of career and careerism. I think and create imaginings of possibilities of Amber's life. How will she continue to story her life at school? How will her life unfold in the outside world when Amber is twenty, thirty? I will obtain my master's degree from this work. I live my relationships with an underlying ethic of care, love, and authenticity making me ever mindful and careful of exploitation and destruction in research/life. And I can't help wondering how the personal voice will be recognized in a culture of domination?

Mellisa

Born: March 5, 1979
Calgary, Alberta

Age: Twelve

Family: mother, father, two younger brothers, one younger sister, two dogs

Education: Grade seven. Has attended a community school program at large urban school since grade one.

Likes/Loves:

Dogs and any kind of animals
Children
Talking/on the phone
Best friend
Babysitting
Boys
Shopping
Reading
Watching T.V.
Jazz dance
Family celebrations
Writing poems
Art
Walt Disney stories and songs

## Mellisa: A real life

I want to be a singer.

Mellisa, December, 13, 1991

Mellisa giggles at first. She rubs her hands and pulls her painted fingernails up into her long sleeves. Her green eyes sparkle. Smiling frequently Mellisa talks freely of her experiences in and out of the classrooms. She tells me personal stories of a "best friend", "really good friends" and "boys" (Conversation, 92-11-22). Other stories start with "I don't know" followed by a stream of connected thoughts and feelings given meaning through facial expressions and body language.

Mellisa, who knows what she feels and what she learns from her feelings, nonetheless struggles to say what she knows. Mellisa tells me a story of what she likes about the music in the film The Little Mermaid:

> Um, oh, I don't know. It's just (pause), I don't know (laugh). I don't really know how to explain it. It's like, I can't explain it but...(Conversation, 91-10-11)

> I don't know. I don't know. I really don't know. Like, I don't know, I like the songs I guess. (Conversation, 92-01-24)

Mellisa tells me happily that her "first priority" in life is to sing (Conversation, 92-01-24), to be a performer. She wants to sing and dance as her career. She talks of relationships with the women and men, and boys and girls who are connected to her through her singing and dancing lessons. Mellisa tells me stories of her love/hate relationship with these private lessons. Mellisa tells me that her lessons will be stopping: "When my mom has her baby..." (Conversation, 92-01-24) "and until my grades go up...." (Conversation, 92-02-14)

I sense Mellisa experiences a tension in balancing her desire to be a performer with school authority. Balancing and organizing schedules leave Mellisa struggling to do what she ought to do:

> Sometimes it's a hassle because I can't get my homework done, if it's like a deadline, if it's supposed to be done on a Tuesday you know. (Conversation, 91-12-13)

Mellisa told stories of her busy schedule.

> I dance every single day,...., practising for her music, and singing on Mondays..... babysit,... and do my homework. (Conversation, 91-12-13)

Mellisa talked of her ideas to create and design fashions, of how she will create fashion designs when she performs. I'd set an example for the people and then they'd want to copy me and stuff like that. (Conversation, 92-02-14) I chuckled to myself. I remember wanting to create, design, construct, and perform.

I heard of struggles in classrooms. These stories did not end in giggles:

> Yup, I understand it. I know math. It's just like when we get the tests. Like I hate tests. (Conversation, 92-01-24)

She uses her hands to explain her confusion. She knows math but not what she is tested on.

> I know math. I don't mind math that much....But it's just when it gets to the tests I just go, my mind goes phussh, right. (Conversation, 92-01-24)

It is not math, she says but a male teacher who yells, lectures, and marks unfairly. She later tells me:

> I strongly believe that he [the math teacher], that either it's his teaching or it's him that makes us un-study, you know. (Conversation, 92-01-24)

I nod and smile. I do know this story, I think, but I know it differently. I know my math story of exclusion. I know what I avoided. Mellisa's story parallels a narrative thread of my 'unlearning' of math. Learning to live a different math story is what I share with Mellisa. What stories do I tell her? What parts of my narrative threads ought to be told in our conversations, I asked myself. I found it difficult hearing Mellisa's stories which sounded like a script I had followed. I wondered how I kept the old story going. I wondered how the telling of my story would be heard by girls this age. How can girls choose to live a different math story? Is it possible?

I felt powerless as a researcher. I suggested proactive ideas, which resurfaced feelings and thoughts of my math experience. Mellisa told me her mother had suggested tutoring. I suggested she work with other girls at school or at home prior to tests and getting 'extra help'. I asked if her math teacher was approachable:

> No, not really. He's scary. Like I don't feel comfortable being in the same room, like you know, like we are, like being in the same room with him alone. Like it's scary. I don't know why. I don't, I don't trust him or anything. (Conversation, 92-01-24)

I nod. I know. My throat tightened remembering feelings of being uncomfortable, afraid, naive; memories of all those times I sat passively and resisted voicing my needs in mathematics. I remember my anxiety. I think of my fear as part of a captive audience. Images start with my grade four math teacher who hit boys with blackboard brushes and chalk. He humiliated them further by having them sit in the grey garbage can for misbehaving or being 'stupid'. Girls were silenced by fear. I sat watching in terror. I cried at home. I told on him.

I tried to validate Mellisa's story. I encouraged her to trust her inner voice. I will always want her to tell her story. I was annoyed hearing a story so similar to my own. I wondered if Mellisa might ever imagine a different kind of math story. Her stories parallel my math experiences of tension, anxiety, confusion, and silence. I felt let down as a learner. I told Mellisa to 'hang in there' and to look forward to next year. Next year, I told her there would be a new teacher. I think to myself. "Why next year?" I want it to change now. I wonder why I repeat this line to wait? What nurtures the notion that says our girls cannot do math? Why do I hear the voices of girls' experiences, twenty years later, awful experiences similar to mine? The voices of girls' math experiences can be heard. What is my response as an educator?

Screening Photographs by Mellisa

#1 - Mother and birth of brother

#2 - Family shot, mother, father, brother, and sister

#3 - Younger sister and grey poodle

#4 - Younger brother and white poodle

#5 - Brother swinging in a tree - sister sitting on the step

#6 - Posed photos her two dogs

#7 - Posed photos her two dogs

#8 - Posed photos her two dogs

#9 - Girl friend - "best friend"

#10 - Three feet; barefoot, colored sock and white sock

My prior reflection

I was visually reminded of what was important in Mellisa's life, that is, her experiences of creating a room for her new brother, papering, picking out a bed, and her love of Mickey Mouse. I thought of her connection with her mother. I wonder how Mellisa would tell stories of her brother. I imagined Mellisa's life as the oldest daughter. I remember my best friend had a newborn sibling when we were about Mellisa's age. Mellisa frequently talks of children and babysitting. I look forward to Mellisa's telling of the story about this photo. (Journal, 92-06-05)

Mellisa's story

H: It's such a lovely picture. Made me cry when I saw it.

M: (laugh)

H: It did. I just had to put that one on the top.

M: My funny looking baby brother (hah).

H: Aah.

M: He's better looking now.

H: (small laugh)

M: He is, he's really cute. Oh gee (small laugh). There's nothing really much like a story. But she [Mom] went to the hospital last, she's in the hospital there. And ah, um, I don't know I guess he was really cranky that day, but that's why he looked so funny and (small laugh) and ah, I don't know, my dad who was, I said daddy can you please take him, take a picture and he said oh OK. I gave him my camera. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

A posed family shot. Mellisa creates a feeling of connection by capturing the family in the position of holding one another. Mellisa is a caring girl. This photograph like our conversations are filled with her caring. This picture is her life before her baby brother. Sitting on a bench in a yard Mellisa's family; her brother, father, mother and sister, smile directly at the camera. Her brother is drinking from a cup. Dad has his arms around his son and Mellisa's mother. Mellisa's sister leans against her mother. A hot sunny summer day reminds me of a "typicalness" of how Canadian culture portrays family. A real family snapshot. How does Mellisa construct stories of family? (Journal, 29-06-05)

Mellisa's story

M: OK. This is before my mom had the baby and I don't know I was just um, just, I don't know, taking a picture. I was just, wanted to show you my family so. And there's the dirt pile in behind, they're

building a new house next door. And it's gone now (hah). It looks much better. But. Anyway, that's my family and OK, this one here, my little sister, her name is Ilona and she's six, she's turning seven in, on July 3rd. And this is my mom, Samantha, and my dad Mark, and my brother and his name is Nick and he's ten and he's turning eleven on July 1st.

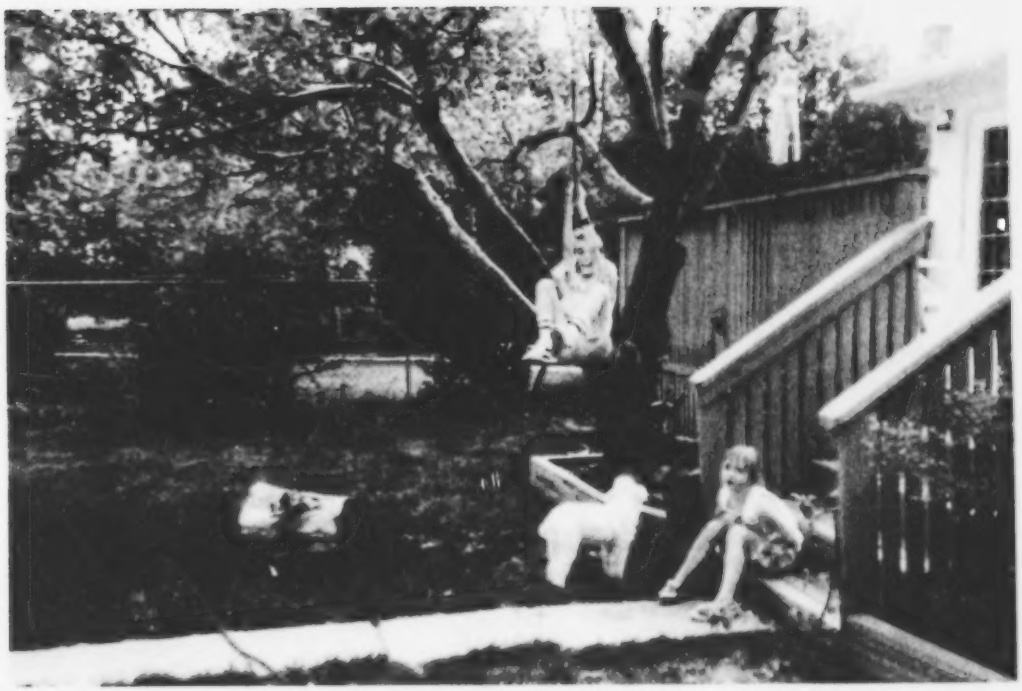
M: And that's my family. (small laugh) Other than me but.

H: Yeah.

M: Other than, and the dogs too, they're missing.

H: Well we got some of them hey so. But did you tell them you wanted them to pose and you took their picture?

M: Well I just said I'm going to take a picture of you guys and for, on my camera. And they said oh OK. So, I tried to. I tried to cut off my brother but he came in the picture anyway (small laugh). Anyway, no ah, so I just wanted to show you what my family looked like when they're happy (small laugh). When they're happy, yeah. That's it. (Conversation, 92-06-12)



My prior reflection

This is a playful photograph, there is movement. I would guess, this is Mellisa's brother, swinging in the tree. Perhaps, this is her sister sitting on the step to the back deck. A white poodle is looking at the boy. I wonder what is being said to Mellisa. What is she telling them? I hear voices and laughter in this photo. (Journal, 92-06-05)

Mellisa's story

M: He's always sort of like. OK. this one we um, Ilona had to be in this picture. I don't know why. I want to be in the picture.

H: (small laugh). She wants to be part of your work.

M: Yeah. And ah, we had, my dad rope climbs and he, my brother set up like a, he sets it up every, like on the weekend when it's nice out. And it's like, we have a crab tree here, which is this one, and then we, on, like over here there's an apricot tree. And he (hah) and

he tied the rope to the trees and it's like a, what are those things called you know when you....

H: You can slide?

M: Yeah, they're hooked on and you hold on, well that's what he's doing in it. It's just a rope and it's just like a, I don't know, it's like climbing material thing. I don't know but it's like an oval and it clips and goes like this. [shows me] (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

Mellisa loves her dogs. She talks fondly of them. I believed she would take pictures of her dogs. She told me she would. Here are her two poodles. One waking from a sleep on the couch pillow and the other stretched out on the area rug. The room appears quiet, leaving an empty feeling. One yellow tennis ball sits under the couch. A lone blue runner sits next to the white poodle stretched on the rug. A ski jacket is in the chair ready to be put on. (Journal, 92-06-05)

Mellisa's story

M: This is my living room and I think my sister just got home. No, I think it's night time or something like that. I don't know. I think it's night time. Anyway and I don't know, I just, again I just

H: This one looks like it was just waking up, Misty looks like she's just waking up.

M: Yeah she did. Sort of. She was sleeping ah, there's like a little ah, patch of carpet where it's really warm because the sun shines on it all the time. And ah, so it was really warm there that day and she was sitting there and I go Misty. I pick her up and I put her on the couch near Leo so that, so that I could take the picture. And then I go 'Misty'. And then she goes. I always catch her in the weirdest positions, like, Leo too, unless I, unless I have them posing.

H: Leo looks like he's having a back scratch.

M: Yeah, he does that. He rolls on the ground on his back and he goes [makes noise] he make the weirdest noises. And he goes [makes noise] (hah) and he likes to eat shoes too. A typical dog you know, like sort of like, you know how they have them in movies and they're chewing on shoes. Well this isn't a movie, this is real life (hah). (Conversation, 92-06-12)

Re-presenting Mellisa's story

This is her real life. Mellisa's photographs are of her life at home, one of relationships with family, best friends, and dogs. Mellisa told of her responsibility for the labor of care. She told me stories of joy and strain in doing this work. Her stories of 'real' life are built from experiences outside school. Mellisa's photographs reinforce connections with those she values and for whom she cares. I suspect Mellisa will remember grade seven as a memorable year because of the wonder and celebration of the birth of her brother. Mellisa was visibly excited about having a new baby in her home and told many stories about this in our conversations. She told stories of happiness; many of being with her mother, of planning, and of preparing for the arrival of her new brother. Mellisa knows the labour of care. I asked her if she wondered what it would be like if she would have a child:

> Yeah, yeah I wonder like what it would be like, you know, just like to, just carry a child, like I know what it's like to have, like not to have a child but to have a child around because I have to take care of my little brother now. And I have also done babysitting. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

Mellisa's stories and pictures reveal the tensions in her life of being in school, of experiencing fragmentation, of failure as an individual, and of being split as a learner. Mellisa felt powerlessness in some classrooms. Mellisa took no photographs of classroom or school life. Her photographic work shows the fabric of her life outside of school: pictures of her home, her family, her best friend, and her dogs.

Studying Mellisa's photographs and conversations created, for me, feelings of being close to family. From these I believe Mellisa values closeness with her mother and with her best friend. I think Mellisa likes being home. She shows and tells of a desire for the ideal harmonious family. She talks of getting along with and being supportive of her family. Mellisa loves to be with her friends. She has a deep connection with her 'best' friend who has recently moved. The distance may not allow the relationship to be sustained.

Mellisa tells stories of her life as one filled with relationships with family, girl and boy friends outside of school, and a desire to

create meaningful connections at school. Hearing Mellisa's stories and seeing her photographs I sense that Mellisa cherishes intimacy - a communal way of living.

Karen

Born: October, 15, 1978
Calgary, Alberta

Age: Thirteen

Family: mother, father, two younger sisters

Education: Grade seven. Karen was transferred to a large urban school to repeat year three.

Likes/Loves:

Watching movies - T.V.
Math
Language arts
Art
Industrial arts
Biking
Being outside
Jumping on a trampoline
Animals - Dogs
Young children
Rain

## Karen: Hearing silence

I learn more when we talk.

Karen, November, 22, 1991

Karen is a tall girl with bright eyes and a stunning smile; a strong smile. Immediately I was aware that her responses seemed different. She presented herself in a calm manner asking me questions of my public and private life. I was comfortable with Karen, pleased to share my stories with her. I felt an atmosphere of ease when I encouraged Karen to speak about herself in our conversations.

In our first conversation Karen told me of being held back, of failing grade three. As she retold the story I felt the pain she still carried. Karen told me she still wishes she had been in junior high last year. In one quick breath she told me, "I didn't like it (being held

back), but it was, it's better that I do because then I will be able to do my classes better." (Conversation, 91-10-11) When she tells herself and me it was better, I ask her if she knows why she was held back:

> No I don't. I didn't get much help all the time from my teacher. She would really help her favorite students. I wasn't good at reading, when I was younger. I wished I would have went ahead, or I wish I was smarter, so. It made me mad. (Conversation, 91-10-11)

Karen tells me she is still slow at reading. "You know. Plus I read at night, like I read more books than I used to. So I get faster once you read more books." (Conversation, 92-12-13) She told me many times about her messy writing, stories of conflict in her math and social studies classes, and of disliking what her teachers require her to read. I sensed in Karen a disconnection from school. My throat hurt when she told me of her disappointment. I thought of my stories of failing subjects and of how school caused fear and stress for me.

Karen told me each time we met she was doing well in her classes, according to her grades. She was getting "bad marks" in social studies. She was visibly stressed by this. As she shared this story I was saddened by changes in her body langauge. Karen told me her work is reflected in her low marks because she does not give the teacher what she wants. Her current events journal in social studies haunts her. I sensed Karen struggled to make her own connections of knowing herself. A struggle of, perhaps, staying in a relationship with her teacher. Each time we meet she tells me of her "horrible marks" in social studies. I can see that Karen cares deeply about her marks in all subject areas. She talks frequently of improving her marks. Sadly she shares, "like that I should have tried harder on it, and better and stuff. I think it's more that I could have done better." (Conversation, 92-02-14)

Karen always brought her binder of school work to our conversations, making it a space to talk about her social studies struggles. I'm not sure who Karen thought I was. Was I researcher, teacher, friend or someone else in her story? As I heard stories of how school let Karen down as a learner, I thought about her avenues of escape.

It is easy to be with Karen, our talks are so warm. I am fascinated with Karen's connections to popular culture. She loves to tell me about

films and television programs she has seen most recently. Each time we meet we talk about popular culture. Karen reminds me that I must watch closely what is portrayed in our media. As I read the transcripts of Karen, I noted her reflections on, and her vast knowledge of cultural phenomena. It became evident that she loved Stephen King, "cop shows", video, and going to the movies. Seeing and hearing Karen make sense of information about, film, books, music, television reminded me about the 'whereness' in the research process. Where do I go to make sense of the told and retold stories? I have thought a lot about how girls feel and make sense of cumulative images of violence against females. What sort of emotions are evoked in girls when images of women are portrayed with violence and sex?

When I watch 'Full House', an evening television sit-com, with Chloé I find myself struggling with both the images and the dialogue. As I hear and see the influence of television I think about the used and unused power of popular culture. I like to imagine connections with educative realities. How would girls make television programs? What images and stories would they tell? I think of the power of possibility in creating healthier images. I want to go beyond sitting and watching, to creating and making television.

"Seen any good movies?" (Conversation, 92-06-12) Karen loves popular horror films. Each time we meet I respond, "No, I haven't been to a theatre or watched any videos". Karen and I have talked of my interest in film. She knows of my connections to women's film. I told her of the National Film Board and Studio D documentaries and my work with a film festival. Karen reinforces my awareness of the powerful impact of popular culture when she tells me stories of film and video. In our June 1992 talk Karen had just seen the film Cape Fear. When I asked her if the film was good she responded:

> Yup, yup, yup. Well (hah) sorry, he handcuffs this girl, he breaks this arm with her, like snaps it, pushes her down, bites part of her cheek off, like, and then spits it out. Like you see it in his mouth and then he spits it out. That's it. And he just punches her and stuff. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

Repulsed, I twist up my face and ask why he was doing this.

> Because he's crazy (hah) I guess. Well, this is what I think it is. The reason why he's doing all of, this is why it is, because he's trying to get back at the lawyer because he has evidence of, because his lawyer is the real main character right? Nick Nolte. And um, um, he had this evidence about this girl that he supposedly raped and um, killed or something like that, and if he would have showed the evidence, he wouldn't have had 14 years in prison and he hah, Robert DeNiro knew about the evidence. And so that's why he's trying to get back at him. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

I haven't seen Cape Fear. I want to now. As I try to create authentic and healthier images of women with still photography, I separate sex and violence. But I have begun to wonder if this is possible within the existing patriarchal structures. When I ask Karen if she is bothered by this violence, Karen assures me "Oh, nothing really. I don't mind it (hah). I love watching violent movies." (Conversation, 92-06-12) Even as Karen continued to tell me that this sort of violence doesn't bother her, she told me she experiences dreams about them five nights later. I asked her if her parents know she goes to these movies. "Yup, I watch it with them. And I watch them alone." (Conversation, 92-06-12)

When I think of Karen's struggles in social studies, I think about the possibility of writing about these popular cultural experiences in class as part of current events. Karen told me her teacher would not approve. Who decides what Karen writes? What written words are silenced, evaded? How do we hear Karen's lived stories of her knowing popular culture?

It was difficult hearing of Karen's struggles with social studies because social studies was always one of my favorites. I understood her concerns about marks, of wanting "higher" marks, of wanting to get more than the passing grade. Marks and grades, for Karen, indicate the extent of her knowing and not knowing subject content. I sense Karen's disconnection from her knowing when she repeats her stories of disconnection. I reflect on my ways of knowing, of dissembling, and of silencing experiences, even now in graduate school. I now ask myself as an educator how do we build communities of learners? Am I creating spaces for connected knowing or institutional knowing? Am I perpetuating the creation of spaces? Karen told me she was 'bored' at school. 'Bored' is

a word I remember well in school. Today I wonder does 'bored' mean too hard; or too easy; or just plain uninteresting?

Karen has a confident voice as she tells me stories of growing older and getting out of school. She says "I'm glad I'm getting older. I don't like being so young." (Conversation, 91-10-11) I asked her what she likes about being older. These are her words, "You get to do more things than when you were younger. You get to go to the mall without your mom and you are not as young like your sister any more. You are older than her, more with adults." (Conversation, 91-10-11) When I asked Karen if she is looking forward to moving into grade eight she told me "Yup. Changing." (Conversation, 91-10-11). "What do you like about the possibility of being older?" I asked her. "Getting out of school." (91-10-11) Karen's stories of escaping from school sadden and frustrate me. Her photographs show herself and her "home" life. Her stories tell of her alienation from her school experience.

Screening Photographs by Karen

#1 - School bus Karen's mom drives

#2 - Karen and her youngest sister

#3 - Karen's dad and youngest sister

#4 - Karen and her youngest sister

#5 - Karen's mother

#6 - Karen's mother

#7 - Karen's head shot

#8 - Karen's two sisters

#9 - A large fish aquarium

#10 - Four boys in a classroom

#11 - Girl from the study

#12 - Two boys showing a "peace" sign

#13 - The art teacher's room

#14 - The art teacher's room

#15 - A girl at school

#16 - A girl at school

#17 - Five girls in the art room posing for a group shot

#18 - Five girls in the art room posing for a group shot

#19 - Two girls hanging their heads upside down

#20 - Girl from the study

#21 - Karen's head shot

#22 - Karen's foot

My prior reflection

This is a solo picture of Karen smiling wonderfully at the lens. I have a feeling of strength, strong esteem, and self worth for Karen in this picture. She appears to be lying down on a flowered pillow. Next to her is a channel changer for either the television or the stereo. Karen looks wholesome and healthy. I wonder who took the shot. (Journal, 92-06-07)

Karen's story

K: There's me taking a picture of myself (hah).

H: OK I was wondering. I was thinking what a unique kind of a perspective, I knew you were lying down. That's cool. That's a lovely picture. That's wild that you would have just figured it all out. I mean it's all so balanced.

K: I never, because like I always figure maybe it might go down too low (hah).

H: Yeah. So you just did that all by yourself. Was anybody around?

K: No (hah). (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

I am amazed how much Karen looks like her mother. She is sitting in the living room in a blue chair wearing a white T-shirt and beige pants. Her arms are relaxed across her body and she appears to be saying something or waiting for Karen. On the right stands a stereo speaker. I know Karen listens to music and likes her Dad's music. Next is an antique chair, perhaps a family heirloom. A flowering plant sits on top of the speaker. Karen has told me her parents love gardening. At the very edge of the photograph is a snip of another unknown person, perhaps her sister. Above her mother's head there are framed pictures; family heirlooms? It seems that this is a surprise shot early in the morning. (Journal, 92-06-07)

Karen's story

K: Oh, my Mom again. And she's just there I guess. Got her on a surprise again.

H: What is she saying?

K: I think she was saying don't take the picture.

H: Yeah (hah). Not now. Was this a weekend morning?

K: I don't know. I think it was on the weekend.

H: She looks so relaxed.

K: Yeah, my uncle lives right next door too. I should have took a picture of his pig. I really should have. He has a pot belly pig. A really nice pot belly pig. I should have. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

The two girls are hanging their heads upside down. A creative and funny shot, yet an uncomfortable disturbing position. I wonder what they are saying and who decided on the pose. I wonder what Karen is saying to them. Who are Karen's friends? I wonder who these girls are? Are these girlfriends or acquaintances? (Journal, 92-06-07)

Karen's story

H: And your friendships have changed?

K: Yeah with some people. Like I don't like everybody that I used to because now you know how they're really like. But I'm still friends with all my old friends. I have always had new fiends every, every year there is always someone new. (cough)

H: Oh bless you.

K: They're hanging upside down.

H: Yeah (hah). Did you tell them to do that?

K: Well I was thinking of doing that and then I said ah, sort of, I guess so, maybe, I don't know. I do it all the time.

H: And they posed?

K: Yeah. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

A shot of Karen's feet. Did she take it? She stands alone. A glow shines in front of her feet. I suspect she is in the artroom. Perhaps, she saying "Here I am world, I'm done!" (Journal, 92-06-07)

Karen's story

K: And there's my feet.

H: Yes on the art floor.

K: (hah) Yup.

H: Grounded. I loved it. What did you do? Do it up and then down.

K: No, no, I just sort of put it down and then turned the camera around and took a picture of myself (hah).

H: What were you thinking at the time?

K: Oh nothing. I don't know.

H: Get this film done.

K: Yeah. Just get it over with. And then I won't have any left (hah). (Conversation, 92-06-12)

Re-presenting Karen's story

As I read and listened to our conversation transcripts, I noted and hear the frequency of the expressions "OK", "Yup" and "Yeah". Often there were long pauses and silences in our conversations. As Karen patrolled her boundaries, her silences panicked me, left me uncertain inside, as I began to think I was not getting the 'right' information as a researcher. With reflection and time to talk over our work, I appreciated sitting quietly with Karen. With our chairs close together we often gazed out of the window of the interview room. I liked these times. I wonder how research creates safe spaces for participants - to just sit and be together. How do I hear Karen's stories?

I felt confident as a researcher with Karen. I relaxed as I tried to figure things out. There were times when I was uncomfortable with Karen's short responses. I thought about who I am in relation to her. Over time our trust developed and a connection grew. I appreciated Karen's wonders about the research process; about using a tape recorder, about changing names, and about the piles of transcripts I brought with me each time. Karen asked what this activity called research was and rightfully so. Underneath Karen's silence, I wondered about her untold story.

Karen was a girl with whom I wished I could have spent more time and had more frequent contact. Given more time, maybe our relationship might have deepened. What would it have been like to walk with Karen as we talked, what if we had met outside of school? I never felt that Karen enjoyed being in school. I began to notice that Karen pulls further away from girls in her class, distancing herself from class mates, what they say and do. Her stories were of disappointments. Her photographs of school were taken to "finish" the film. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

Karen is not involved with extra curricular activities. She limits her attendance at dances, and talks little of social friendships as part of school life. I do not have a sense that Karen wishes to be alienated but she does spend her required time in school, no more, no less. School is a space from which to escape. Karen leaves her school/classroom unaffected and unchanged in her voice, her feelings, ideas and opinions.

As an educator I continue to ask myself who do I teach in the classrooms? How do I teach? Is Karen the same quiet girl in class as she is with me in this research relationship? Do I hear the silence of girls?

Harmony

Born: February 5, 1980
Calgary, Alberta

Age: Eleven

Family: mother, father, two dogs, two cats

Education: Grade six. Attends a regular school program at large urban school since grade five.

Likes/Loves:

Dogs and cats
Talking on the phone
Boys
Travel
Shopping
Crafts
Physical Education
Skiing
Skating
Jumping on a trampoline
Camping
Movies
Parties/Dances
Popular music and music magazines
Math
Staying up late

Harmony: A web of connection

I talk on the phone to a lot of people

Harmony, November, 22, 1991

Harmony is a tall and slender eleven year old with long brown hair and a healthy outdoor appearance. She barely looks at me with her blue green eyes. She speaks softly, her hands covering her mouth. She fidgets and makes facial expressions when she appears uncertain of the questions I ask. Her uncertainty mirrors mine. This is our first conversation, my first 'official research' interview. In this cold room we talked about our families and school life. Harmony responded to some of my queries

briefly, to others with strong non-verbal responses, graphically, with her hands, her smiles, and her facial expressions, as she finished her stories. I reflected on my relationships with the people in Harmony's life. At the beginning of our initial conversation I told Harmony that her mother was one of my midwives. I told her that I had attended a teacher education program with her homeroom teacher. Each time I talked with Harmony I was reminded of the connecting stories, of the times I was with these people who are characters in Harmony's stories. I thought a lot of Harmony's community, of her friends, her family, and her teachers. This made me really cautious.

Harmony told me about travelling with her mother, staying at her father's house, being outdoors, and her love of her cats and dogs. She has close connections to a community of girl friends in and out of school but told me few stories, about them, those at school. Harmony talked about her boyfriend. She wore a necklace with his picture. She was so pleased to have a boyfriend. Spencer, her boyfriend, is the brother of one of the girls in the study, he is a year younger and in a different class. I wondered what girls mean when they say I have a 'boyfriend'. What do they do with their boyfriends? I was amazed when Harmony listed off all the girls in her class who are 'coupled off' with boys. Only two have not, "because there weren't any boys left in our class." (Interview, 92-01-24) As researcher I thought of the dominant story our culture establishes for girls -- one of being white, middle-class and heterosexual. Amber and Karen tell no stories of having boyfriends. As a mother I asked Harmony if I should expect Chloé to tell me stories of being 'coupled off' in grade six. She assured me that I will.

Curious to hear Harmony's ideas I told connecting pieces of stories of myself, her teacher, her mother and other women friends. I was comfortable doing this. I first met Harmony at my house just prior to Chloé's planned homebirth. Harmony's mother was one of the midwives I had been seeing through the nine months of growing Chloé. I was with a wonderful community of women; connected, strong, and political. I lived a busy nine months reading and writing about birthing and babies. I was quick to relate my stories with Harmony and hoped to hear her stories, but I felt that she seemed wary of my presence. I was aware of my desire to

provide a way for Harmony to come into a relationship with me, inspite of our age difference which may have lead to inequality.

I thought of girls approaching the "wall into adolescence" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992) and relationships with boys all lived amidst Canadian cultural images and notions of romance and love. What does Harmony give up to have a boyfriend? How do media and literature portray heterosexual couples? How do young women choose to connect to boys? When I asked Harmony how she knows he treats her nicely? She told me, "Well, like he sticks up for you, um, well like carnations, get you a carnation and blah. You know, like, stuff I guess, you know." (Conversation, 92-01-24)

What does it mean when a girl takes what she knows and hides it: "Consciously taking what she knows safely underground, where she can examine what she is learning and decide for herself what she thinks and feels is right." (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.204) Perhaps, Harmony does leave those in her life unaffected by her voice, her feelings, her ideas and her opinions. When I read and listened to our talks I found myself thinking of my response to the "I don't know" and "you know" stories. I thought of my queries evolving out of our talk, not scripted questions, but questions I hoped would encourage the young women to talk about their experiences. When Harmony asked "you know?", it left me wondering how I ought to respond: tell her the traditional stories or stay silent. This is still my dilemma.

I wondered if Harmony may have interpreted my question about her boyfriend as a way of making legitimate her experience. Perhaps, Harmony thinks I know about the underground. What should I have said and not said? I was never certain about how to respond to the "you know" stories. Often I did not respond. "You know" may suggest that she may have had a question as to whether I also knew what she knew. (Brown, & Gilligan, 1992, p.165) Perhaps Harmony wanted me to question the part of the unsaid. What do I assume to be real? What do I take for granted? I thought of how I align myself in relationships. How will I respond to the "you know" stories, in the future?

Harmony proudly told a story of a school fundraiser where the students sold Valentine carnations:

> Yeah, it was my idea. Well what happens is there's this big table and they're selling them for a dollar each and then like you place the order thing and you can have what color you want and what it meant, then there's to, from and then your message. And like red means love, pink means good friends, like, and white means just friends. (Conversation, 92-10-24)

Enthusiastically she told me they made $126 for the student council.

Harmony limited her stories and gave me information. I had a sense that Harmony moves her thoughts and feelings underground. One story was about a fight two of her girlfriends had at school:

> Well Susan and Kathy are having a fight. Well not like physical fights. But it's like they don't like each other. And Janet and Dorothy and I are caught in the middle. (Conversation, 91-12-13)

I asked her why they don't like each other right now and she told me:

> Well, we don't know because, like. It's kind of, like Susan, like she says stupid things sometimes and Kathy gets mad at her. And then Susan gets mad at her for saying that she's stupid and it goes on and on and on. (Conversation, 91-12-13)

I asked her what she would do if she were Kathy. "I don't know. I'd forget it" (Conversation, 91-12-13). I asked her if this fight seemed trivial. "Yeah" she told me. (Conversation, 91-12-13) The girls have conflicting Zodiac signs therefore it makes it difficult. "Because like Susan's a Cancer and Kathy's a Leo. And together." (Conversation, 91-12-13) Harmony finished the story with her hands and facial expressions showing me that the relationship simply would not work. She continued, "So we can't pick sides or anything. So we just have to stay out of it. Like you guys, forget it. Stuff like that". (Conversation, 91-12-13)

Screening Photographs by Harmony

#1 - Harmony's cat

#2 - Harmony's dog

#3 - Harmony's mom in the kitchen

#4 - Harmony by the bathroom mirror

#5 - Grandma, Mom, and Grandpa

#6 - Grandma, Mom, and Harmony

**#7 - Grandpa holding a photograph of Harmony**

#8 - Harmony's uncle's house

**#9 - Harmony's Mom and Dad**

#10 - Harmony and her Dad with two dogs and two cats

#11 - Two girl friends leaning against a fence

#12 - A girl holding a plastic gun to her head

**#13 - Four girls by a door at school**

**#14 - Home room teacher**

#15 - A boy in Harmony's class

#16 - A girl in Harmony's class

#17 - A classroom in rows

#18 - A girl in Harmony's class

#19 - Music teacher and a girl in Harmony's class

#20 - A girl in Harmony's class

#21 - Harmony's boy friend

#22 - A boy from Harmony's class

#23 - Harmony's boy friend

#24 - Harmony's boy friend

My prior reflection

This must be a picture of Harmony's grandpa. He is holding a photo of Harmony. How did Harmony talk about her photography to her Grandpa? He is holding the framed photo directly at the camera lens. His gaze is direct. He seems so proud. I reflect on how I miss my parents, and grandparents. I am reminded of my extended family connections and stories. (Journal, 92-06-09)

Harmony's story

J: And that's my Grandpa on his birthday, his 75th birthday.

H: Oh wow.

J: And that's what I gave him, a picture of me.

H: It's a lovely picture. He looks so proud. He must love you a lot.

J: Yeah, considering I'm his only granddaughter, grandchild. Yeah, well I told him to hold the picture up.

H: He'll love that. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

Harmony's Mom and perhaps Harmony's Dad are standing in a doorway. Harmony has told me that her parents live apart. Her Mom's eyes are partly closed. The man is holding her shoulder. He looks outdoorsy wearing a Volvo baseball cap and a neckerchief. There is a playfulness in the atmosphere. I wonder what is being said. (Journal, 92-06-09)

Harmony's story

J: That's the front way to our house. My mom and dad. My mom was (hah) she was being really weird right then. And I just kind of put my dad's hat on there. I think that was a cold day because we're kind of dressed like it was a cold day.

H: And your dad lives close by?

J: Yup, he just lives up the hill. Yeah, and like I stayed at his place last night too. So.

H: They look like they're such nice friends.

J: Yeah, they are. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

There are four girls at the front or side door of the school. They appear to be making faces. They seem to be gazing at someone or something. One girl is looking directly at the camera, smiling brightly. One girl is laughing while the other has her hand around her neck. The girl in a green Bravo t-shirt is looking out of the picture. There is a happy feeling in this photo, a feeling of privilege. (Journal, 92-06-09)

Harmony's story

J: Um, well, actually we're just out back of school, I guess,, after recess or something. Actually no that was after family fun night because Robin won a shirt.

H: OK.

J: AM106 shirt. And see Robin and I both brought our cameras to school and between Sarah, Robin and I, the flashes were going off like nuts. It was quite funny. (Conversation, 92-06-12)

My prior reflection

Ahhh Mr. Thomas. Here he is being a teacher with traditional letters above the black board. This is a different Mr. Thomas from the one I know as a friend and fellow student from my undergraduate years. What a traditional pose: Is he lecturing or returning papers? I wonder what happens in this classroom community. Whose experiences are heard? Who has the dominant voice? When I conversed with Harmony, I wondered how I listened to what children said in classrooms. (Journal, 92-06-09)

Harmony's story

J: And I took a picture of Mr. Thomas giving a lecture.

H: Giving, OK. So no more?

J: No (hah)

J: OK, well, he's always stands up at the front of the classroom giving lectures and stuff.

H: About?

J: About stuff.

H: Stuff

J: Like we should be more quiet and he's like he's the totally opposite of our math teacher because like he's, he's like it's the end of the year. You can chew gum in class like once in a while. Um, you can't, like he won't give you much homework or anything. Whereas my math teacher, she's like, in a way um, like next year in grade seven this will be the hardest couple of weeks because they have all your final exams, blah, blah, blah, blah. We get lots of homework from her.

H: Is Mr. Thomas being more positive about the year end?

J: Yup. (Interview, 92-06-12)

Re-presenting Harmony's story

Harmony began our talks in a quiet wariness, tentative at first. She seemed uncertain about whether it was safe to say aloud to me what she knows is happening inside and outside of school. When does the honesty become too risky? Harmony told me "little stories" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). She gave me information about people and events; a clue into her image of the average girl, the proper girl. I felt that at eleven years old Harmony had experienced a depth of feelings, but separated them from the complexity of living out this research relationship. I sensed she was actively resisting her inclination not to speak. Her photographs portray the web of her relationships. I suspect she knows from experience but struggles to hold onto how she makes sense of what is happening. A conversational approach requires time. Did I have enough time with Harmony?

Harmony spoke little of knowing of herself, little of connecting her thinking and feeling. Until this past week, December 11, 1992, I believed that I unintentionally put Harmony in the middle space between people who are important to her. Being connected to Harmony's mother and her teacher created a space for me to remember experiences, as well as to give me a way to get over my initial uncertainty about talking with girls. I wondered aloud to Harmony about whether I placed her in the middle. Harmony said No, she did not feel that way. When I talked with Jean and Robin, the research team, I wondered what conversations would have been like for Harmony with either of them.

What was it like for Harmony to have conversations with me, a person who already knew fragments of her life? I thought of how I sustained the relationships with people that I knew in Harmony's life. How would my research relationship have withstood the reality of a 300 km distance? I wanted to reassure my research friendship with Harmony as I listened to the silence in our six conversations. My doubt troubled me. Silence became part of our shared stories. We share a silence.

Harmony's photographs are a rich web of her connections inside and outside of school. She shows a life of negotiating relationships with family, friends, girlfriends, school friends and a boyfriend. I felt that

Harmony wanted to negotiate an authentic relationship with me but I heard fear in her voice. With the emergence of an underground, Harmony may have experienced feelings that might have jeopardized her other relationships. Perhaps, she felt telling me would be dangerous. Going underground was safe.

As I listened to and re-read my conversations with Harmony I heard the silence. At times the silence was deafening. I remembered my own doubts and uneasiness. What are the silences in our conversations? Her photos show a balance, tell a different story of a relational life connected to many people. Listening closely to what was not said I believe that Harmony protected herself by removing her deep feelings and thoughts from my scrutiny, and our discussions, and had taken them into the underground world. Harmony's story marks a "relational impasse"; her desire to say what she feels and knows conflicts with her desire to have a relationship, or not disrupt a relationships, that is, not hurt anyone. (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.198) It was evident that it was becoming difficult for her to say directly what she was thinking and feeling. She appeared unable to say it outside of the context of highly confidential or best-friend relationships (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.171-172).

I thought a great deal about the contradiction of being an authority in the researcher guise and my desire to have an authentic relationship; one I had imagined given our prior connections. Understandably, I was regarded with curiosity and suspicion. What does it mean to have a relationship with a woman researcher who is twenty years older? As I reflected and talked with the research team, I wondered about Harmony's lived stories. From the research team I heard stories of how Harmony is a pillar in the interconnected relationships with girls at school. Other girls have talked of going to Harmony when they experienced dilemmas. Why did Harmony not tell those lived stories of relationships? I imagined myself at Harmony's age, living her experiences. Whom does she trust? Although we shared a congenial atmosphere as we talked I do not believe that we got past the authority of who I was a as researcher.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Connecting narratives of experience: Stories and photographs

> If you look closely at just one wire in the cage, you can not see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere.
>
> Frye, 1983, p.34

It is impossible to identify and take into account all aspects of the girls' lived worlds. Frye's words describe how I have come to understand their stories in the narrative accounts I have written. I began to connect the girls' personal and historical texts at a time when they face the necessity to listen to self and to tradition. In considering how to connect the girls' narratives of lived and told experience I looked at their faces, postures, expressions and photographs. I heard their voices and listened to the silences of the unasked questions. Often I heard small, soft voices, at times, courageously trying to speak up. I analyzed their photographs while listening to their voices. In return I acknowledged and valued their lived experiences inside and outside of the classroom.

#### Relationships: Built within an ethic of care

I restoried the relationship between woman and girl. By talking openly with girls, I believe, we can change and transform our lives. I was committed to cultivating our relationships in an atmosphere of an ethic of caring and authenticity. Hearing and understanding their narratives was reliant on having a sense of relationship, especially in the research process. Our research relationships were teaching and learning situations during which honesty, trust, and caring for each other grew. Being the researcher in the relationship placed me in a position of responsibility. Within my relationships with each other, we constructed

unique ways to create safe spaces to hear girls' narratives in the research process. This has been an educational experience, a unique opportunity to see the many wires of the birdcage.

Building relationships within an ethic of care was my starting point for hearing and understanding their told stories. Many stories tugged at my girlhood silences. Being in this research relationship with girls enabled me to look back with fresh eyes and come to new understandings of my stories that paralleled theirs. We were provided with the luxury of time and space to make meaning of these lived experiences, together.

Creating a trusting and supportive atmosphere made it safe to take risks. Being able to speak takes both courage and time. In our talks I encouraged the girls to interpret their own desires and convictions, and at the same time I attempted to have them value the stories of others and to learn from them. Over the eighteen months our talks grew and I learned to converse by showing my fidelity and imperfections. There were times, I sensed, the honesty became too risky for the girls and myself. The "you know stories" were an invitation to acknowledge the risk. Sometimes I or the girls refused the risk, implied by these stories.

Through talking and seeing their photographs I gained a deeper sense of value of the personal, the contextual, and the temporal threads of their lived experiences. These are just a few of the lessons I have learned in listening, seeing, and hearing the gendered voices of girls in relation with race, ethnicity, and or social class.

Relationships with families

The four girls talked of and showed their worlds of caring and love of family, friends, and animals. They echoed hope for attentive family connections. As I talked and studied the girls' photographs I gained an understanding of how much they cherish intimacy and community. Amber, Karen, and Harmony showed photographs of their communities in their homes and classrooms. Interestingly, Mellisa's photographs were all of her home life. The girls shared their family stories of celebration and conflict. Karen disclosed stories of verbal insults, pushes and shoves with her sister. She was adamant that I understand that they were not

"physical fights". Each time we met she talked of her struggle with wanting to enhance the relationship with that sister. She knew that her rivalry with her sister was distressing her parents. In our June conversation Karen happily reported a change in her relationship with her sister; "But actually there's, it's actually a miracle, we're [her sister] actually getting closer to each other" (Conversation, 92-06-13). Her smile and eyes finished the story. Karen was proud of her positive influence on the development of this relationship.

The girls told many stories and provided photographs of how they wanted to portray their families as authentic; however they moved quickly into the idealized conventional notions of the perfect family. They cushioned their stories of contention, and of not being heard, with gentle reminders of their own care and responsibility. They knew what was expected of them as the daughter/sister in these relationships. As much as they desired to make their own choices, attain a greater sense of independence and freedom, many stories connected back to their relationships with their mothers' desires. Stories of wanting to grow up more quickly, of going to the mall without their mothers, and of going to parties were linked to everyday knowing and learning about being a girl heading into adolescence. All the girls showed photographs of their mothers. They seemed to appreciate their mothers' strength in working hard outside and inside the homes. They supported their mothers' work: their care of siblings; their care of grandparents; and their attendance at school. They told stories of how their mothers balanced multiple work responsibilities. I gained a sense of the girls' connection, respect, loyalty, and genuine desire for their mothers to be happy.

Amber gave an optimistic account of her active participation in daily family routines:

> Because we are all so different, we can't do all of ours together, all of the things together. So, we just, instead of, mom doing and telling her to do all this stuff we just have to do some..... I'm sort of an independent person. I like having people around me but I, like, um when my mom used to make my lunch every night, it was always the same thing. So I told her I wanted different things and so I started making my own lunch. Because then I could buy what I wanted and then I could make it, you know. And now we do a lot of our own stuff, like I do my laundry. I like it because it

> makes me a more responsible person. I feel that my parents trust me when they do that kind of thing. And they let me because some people will say, the iron, you're not allowed to use the iron because you'll burn yourself. All this stuff. So, I'm happy about it. I like it. (Conversation, 91-10-11)

Although I perceived strong mother/daughter connections, each girl did tell stories and showed photographs of her father. Accounts of their fathers revolved around what I call 'extras'; being taken to horseback riding lessons, being driven somewhere special, buying items they could not afford themselves and talking about school projects. Mellisa was very pleased that her father had taken her camera to the hospital to take a picture of her baby brother since she had to stay home to care for her younger siblings. Harmony was excited that her father had stood in a ticket line to get concert tickets during school hours. "Well actually my dad got tickets for New Kids concert so Susan's dad got them for Bryan Adams" (Conversation, 92-01-24). The girls appreciated the extras that their fathers provided; their patience, their waiting, and their monetary support.

Hearing these family stories, I connected to the reality of their family life as they scrambled to schedule 'time' and balance work commitments. At times I sensed that the girls felt the strain. Individually they told stories of wanting to be listened to by their parents, even when those adults in their lives were busy.

As a mother who balances numerous spaces I really thought about these stories. These accounts tugged at my memories and obliged me to reflect on how I now live my life. How do I create spaces to enable my daughter and me to talk? To whom do I say no? How do I listen to her voice? Will I always catch myself when I listen with "one ear"? How do I ensure individual time with her? I still need time by myself and with others. I know that her father also grapples with dilemmas about relationships. Does gender affect the relationship? The girls' stories and family photographs reminded me that I need to make sure that I create time to hear Chloé's voice as she is growing up. It is not always easy or even possible at times. This is the challenge for parents struggling to balance their lives.

Invisible work

The girls shared stories of the labour of caring for younger siblings, extended family members, and neighborhood children. The talk of earning money for different kinds of work raised my awareness of how young they are when relegated to marginal work, that is, the cooking, the cleaning, and the babysitting. They are now in the cycle of laboring at culturally devalued and invisible work. This division of housework touched me. Reflecting back on my girlhood I do not remember the same level of involvement or responsibility at their age. I helped out around the house doing invisible work and I worked for a catering firm on Saturdays in grade ten. However, I never babysat, cooked, or did my own laundry. Memories of my girlhood are of times playing, being outside, going places with my girlfriend, and of being in extra art and music lessons.

The girls earn money, have extra lessons paid for, or have clothing bought in exchange for their work. These rewards gave the girls a sense of worth for those efforts. Harmony's work experience was in creating origami earrings, bracelets, and "other stuff" for a Christmas fair. She and a friend were happy that they earned their own money:

> And one day Susan and Kathy and I went up to the mall. Well, we went Christmas shopping, and I bought something for my mom at this store made of sand. (Conversation, 92-11-22)

This was our secret at that time since Harmony didn't want her mom to know what she bought her for Christmas. Being able to create and sell her own creations was a powerful experience.

Mellisa balanced an extremely busy babysitting schedule on weeknights and weekends. There were times when I perceived Mellisa struggling with balancing her school work, singing lessons, and childcare.

> I babysit on Tuesday, from seven thirty to nine thirty. Sometimes it's until ten.... I babysit sometimes for them on Saturdays or on Fridays. (Conversation, 91-11-22)

I thought about Mellisa's "centeredness" as a learner in the classroom and how she maintained a sense of being whole inside and outside of school. She told stories of her "personal practical" knowledge of caring

for children, and using her skills to comfort and soothe children and to put her brother to sleep. Mellisa told me she was paid well for her babysitting outside of her home. "Well, she [the mother] pays me $5 an hour. Usually I only ask for $3" (91-12-13).

Our talks all took place on Fridays and what I often saw were tired girls. They told me stories of being tired. They told of busy week schedules; of having "tons of homework"; of being out late on school nights for dance festivals; of caring for children; of extra lessons; and of doing all that invisible work. When I asked them what they would do on Saturday mornings they told that they enjoyed relaxing, taking a hot bath, and sleeping in. This raised my wonders of how we as women occupy a number of spaces in our culture and how girls begin the cycle of the second shift. Domestic work is an almost all female occupation, mirroring the bonds between women and the home. I think hard about the fatigue factor in these girls' lives. The invisible work girls do continues to be a curiosity for me. I wonder what really happens at the domestic hearth. I did not ask questions about this.

Girls' friendships

Each of the girls told stories of friendships with peers and siblings in relation to their sense of self. They showed photographs of their peers both inside and outside of school. These friendships were, and are, vital as they make meaningful sense of who they are in the world. I smiled when they told the stories of going to school dances called "lousy" since the disc-jockeys played poor music; the dance had "stupid" themes; or were held at a time when no one could go.

When the girls talked of boys or boyfriends they talked of hanging out in mixed groups. Three of them loved to talk on the phone. Karen did not. Some stories were virtually an imitation of the accepted cultural images of boy crazy girls hanging on the phone. Mellisa disclosed a heart breaking story of her boyfriend at the Valentine's dance the night before our talk:

> Like one of my friends, like she's a really good friend. Her name is Jasmine. And she (small laugh), she took my boyfriend

> away. And I don't know why I got so upset because I really don't like him that much any more. But I got really upset and everything and I was, I got really mad at her (hah). I don't know but um, I said you knew, you knew that we were going out and I said you had no right to do that. And she says, I'm sorry, I didn't know, right. And I said that's, that's a lie. Because she knew. (Conversation, 92-02-14)

As I thought of Mellisa being hurt by her friends and of "crying her eyes out in the washroom", I wondered how girls can be such bullies and make each other's lives completely miserable. I remember horror stories of the power plays that go on between adolescent girls at school, especially those involving boys. Hearing Mellisa's stories evoked pain and guilt feelings associated with my junior high school memories. I remember times when we, as girls, were cruel. I still do not know why.

Mellisa and Harmony talked of boyfriends while Amber and Karen told few boy stories. I now wonder about what knowledge girls have of their own sexuality. When they revealed stories of "boredom" and alienation in their health classes I had many wonders leaving me to question: what are we teaching girls and boys about the emotional commitments in their sexual lives? What is evaded? Are the girls active or passive? Are health curricula steeped in fear of AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy?

Issues of sexuality and relationships are critical to me. I value the right to control my own body as well as the right to intimacy. I think hard about how images are portrayed in the media and how the stories are written.

<u>The beauty myth</u>

It was only when I asked questions that the girls talked about physical appearance. These responses were usually superficial ones. The girls' photographs validated how the beauty backlash is shaping their lives. Karen's photographs of self showed me her strength which I suspect often goes unseen or unnoticed. Harmony's mother took one picture of Harmony getting ready to go out, a picture Harmony did not like. Mellisa

and Amber showed no self portraits. I wondered what this meant -- if anything?

I wanted to know which magazines the girls read. It pleased and surprised me to hear that they read few, if any. Harmony did not read fashion magazines but brought to my attention music magazines such as Bop and Big Bop. The images in music magazines differ little from those in fashion magazines. The girls do look at magazines at dental offices or other peoples homes. Harmony told of reading a People magazine with her friend Susan:

> We would like, you know, how there is like people and they tell about them. Like Tom Cruise, and the there is like his age and then they'll tell about him? And then we cover and we try to guess how old he is. And there is like some people, this one lady, she looked like um, um like, you know, oh I forgot, but like she looked so young and she was like, like 57. And she must have had plastic surgery or something. (Conversation, 92-12-13)

Wrinkling up her nose she continued to say:

> Well, I don't see what's the point because like, you know you're going to get older if you like it or not.

She could not imagine having plastic surgery herself:

> Well, at first like, I think, the image just these days to like, why do you have to be like so skinny, so beautiful and everything. (Conversation, 92-12-13)

Appearance was important for the girls as evidenced in the ways they dressed and cared for themselves. I commented each time we met about how wonderful they looked because I wanted them to feel good. I worried about them beginning to feel pain and/or compulsion. I became aware of how girls feel about their appearance through their responses to being photographed by me. When I asked the girls if I could take a photograph of them they expressed worries such as; "I don't look great today", "I look horrible", "I'm having a bad hair day", or "let me take my glasses off". When I returned their photographs they again commented on how dissatisfied they were with themselves. Regardless of what I said, the girls expressed self dissatisfaction with their photographs. I felt badly.

They worried about their nose, teeth, hair, smile and complexion. When I asked Mellisa about girls and wearing make-up and why she wore make-up she told me:

> Yeah, like the people that are getting 100% in every subject. They don't wear make up. Because they're just too pretty (hah). They don't need it. I don't know. I guess I wear it [make up] because I have it, because I started wearing it in, um, when I was ten, I think. And I'm twelve now. Yup. When I was ten. And so it's just become a habit. Every morning I just go in and like put it on. (Conversation, 91-12-13)

I wondered if this made Mellisa feel good about who she was or was she telling me she had to change.

When Amber had her hair cut I asked her why and she reported with what I thought was a positive statement of freeing herself from the time of doing her hair:

> I got it chopped.... I want it short again. I liked it short. I didn't have to anything with it. Just brush it about ten times and go to school. It saves me so much time, having to fiddle with it putting it up and doing my bangs. (Conversation, 91-12-13)

When I asked her if she wore make-up Amber told me only for traditional ethnic dancing.

> We all wear eyeliner. It is just like a traditional thing because in India they have this thing, like even when the baby is born, they put it on and it's like the eye thing. And then, well I used to wear it all the time last year and that's what the baby wears so it wasn't considered make up. (Conversation, 91-12-13)

This generation, just as my generation from the 1960's, continues to be confronted with images of females that are exploitive, degrading and used to commodify human bodies. I struggled about when to tell girls that images in magazines, film and television are not real or desirable. It is easy to trivialize the beauty myth and say that one is not affected. The beauty myth affects us all whether we are conscious of it or not. It is vital to me that the beauty myth is brought out of the personal into the political. I struggled with the idea of making such young girls conscious of the beauty myth. How do we make sure they feel good about themselves without learning to live a story that is unhealthy?

I never asked the girls directly about their relationship with food. When they told stories about school lunch times I listened intently, yet, I felt powerless to respond; fearing I would sound like I was preaching. When the girls told stories of shortened lunch hours, forgetting lunches, or being involved in scheduled activities I worried. This made me think about how children eat lunches; quickly and rushed. What do we do for the children who forget lunches or lunch money? My direct talk about the beauty myth was limited as I felt it was too risky. I was not involved in this research to impose my concerns on Amber, Mellisa, Karen and Harmony.

My concerns about the "beauty myth" surface from my lived experiences and struggles to be satisfied with my body. All these girls watch television and go to the movies. They are encapsulated in a culture that portrays beauty as competitive, hierarchal and violent. Unfortunately, there is little chance of getting away from these images. According to Wolf (1992) beauty ideals and myths are everywhere. These myths are a result of; social evolution, Christianity, and/or the manifestation of male sexual desire. The effects manifest themselves in many ways.

In conversation with Naomi Wolf (1992) we talked about the beauty myth in connection to girls in this study. She applauded the use of cameras as a way of allowing girls to create their own images of lived experiences. In her opinion, schools need to "set up anorexia and bulimia intervention programs just as they would drug programs or eating programs. "They would if boys were starving themselves to death". She suggested, "bulletin boards of magazine images of women's and girls bodies ought to be created in relation to those images the girls created." (Wolf, 1992, personal communication)

## CHAPTER SIX

### Education for girls: If not now, then when?

> As the hitherto "invisible" and marginal agent in culture, whose native culture has been effectively denied, women need a reorganization of knowledge, of perspectives and analytical tools that can help us know our foremothers, evaluate our present historical, political, and personal situation, and take ourselves seriously as agents in the creation of a more balanced culture.
>
> Rich, 1979, p.141

The girls photographed few teachers. Harmony took one photograph of her homeroom teacher, the others were of the art and music teachers.

Amber shared the only positive stories of learning. Her stories of schooling were experiences of doing and daring. She told of having choices, challenging assignments and of work experiences outside of school. She gave accounts of being a significant part of her evaluation process. Report card day was stressful for all the girls, although Amber was highly successful according to traditional methods of evaluation. She talked each time we met of "moving up" on the honour roll, of wanting top grades and of being the best. Part of her story changed as the year progressed. I began to sense her feelings of disillusionment by what it meant for her to be competitive:

> Well I don't know, I just felt, I don't know. I didn't think it was fun being competitive. So like it's good to have like a competitive spirit but I think it's funner not to. So. It's good, because I'm doing just as well without being competitive. So it's great, it doesn't make any difference. (Conversation, 92-03-27)

I was troubled when I heard the other girls' stories. Karen, Mellisa, and Harmony echoed stories of being shortchanged in their schooling experiences. This troubled and saddened me. They were often ambivalent and alienated towards their own ability to succeed in school. Karen's stories reflected these feelings:

> I don't write that much. I'm not, not good at poems or writing. Well I think, stories I'm not that good at either

> but I think I'm alright. My writing is pretty lousy. (Conversation, 91-11-22)

Mellisa and Harmony echoed similar stories. Karen knows that she learns when she has an opportunity to talk, however, this is rarely encouraged. Karen told me how she did learn:

> We learn more when we talk. It is better to talk in a group or with our friends. But I don't like talking like in front of the whole entire class. (Conversation, 91-11-22)

These girls blame themselves for their shortcomings. Several times the girls reported favoritism. One story Karen told hurt me as woman and as a teacher:

> She didn't like me at all. She always favored um the real smart kids, the ones who always got A's in everything. I don't think that's fair. It should be like how, on our work not about, well it's like. It's hard to explain it to you (hah). But um, I think that they [teachers] should just keep it to themselves if they like that person more than the other, well, instead of showing it and hurting like the other children's feelings. (Conversation, 92-11-22)

These girls are not naive. Their stories told of being treated differently, of power differentials, and of evaded topics that were vital to their lives. Hearing stories of confusion, fear, silence, inequity, and competition over collaboration leads me to question the hope of creating classroom communities. These questions are of concern when "adolescence is a critical time in girls' lives - a time where girls are in danger of losing their voices and thus losing connection with others, and also a time when girls, gaining voice and knowledge, are in danger of knowing the unseen and speaking the unspoken" (Gilligan, 1990, p.25).

Hearing stories of classrooms with chilly climates -- of petty, repetitive ways of consistently being shortchanged leads me to wonder about matters of nurture and of classroom attention. This discovery seems so obvious that it is hard to understand why it appears unnoticed. When I recall my own stories of being alienated, ignored and treated unfairly as a girl in school or of being a woman in higher education I ask myself: are these "chilly climates" (Hall, 1982) so ingrained that they are routinely taken for granted. Have we left out the gender analysis in childhood?

Hearing girls' accounts of classroom experiences led me to reflect on my teaching practice. Whose life curriculum do I hear? Style (1992) compares curriculum to an architectural structure that schools build around students. "Ideally, the curriculum provides each student with both windows out onto the experiences of others and mirrors her or his own reality and validity" (in AAUW report, p.64). I have asked myself: is my teaching practice biased towards those who dominate the classroom? What are my unconscious biases against girls? Whom do I engage in the process of connected teaching? Knowing boys comment more easily, who do I choose to ignore? I am aware of sex stereotyping yet I know whose hand I tell to go up if an answer is presented out of turn. To which children do I give my attention and why? Whose work do I believe is "very good"? These questions are not easily resolved. It is not easy nor is there one way to foster gender-equitable education. There are many ways to teach, and many curricula. As I consider the questions that surface and resurface I reflect on my teaching practice and think about what power I have in institutions of learning.

As a researcher and educator I need to explore the evaded curriculum: those matters central to the lives of students and teachers which are touched upon but briefly, if at all. I want to include issues relating to the functioning of bodies, the expression and valuing of feelings, and the dynamics of power (AAUW report, 1992). These dilemmas need to be explored both formally and informally in the exchanges among teachers and students. Presently, serious consideration of these topics is avoided, but ought not to be. I will continue questioning what it means to grow up female in Canada -- where only male attention has given us a sense of ourselves, and that the culturally accepted way to achieve this goal is to resort to aggressive, even violent, behavior. We need a woman's language.

During our series of talks, I sensed the girls were becoming aware of "gender politics", a subject that many schools may prefer to ignore. If we do not begin to discuss openly the ways in which ascribed power, whether on the basis of race, sex, class, sexual orientation, or religion, affects individual lives, we will not be truly preparing our students for citizenship in a democracy (AAUW report, 1992).

These stories and photographs of four girls' lives are of a 'moment in time'-- snapshots of their lived worlds. From their narratives of experience I have an opening to create, relive, and reconstruct life stories. The process of narrative inquiry allowed me to envision that possibility. Summarizing the girls' narratives of experience was not my intention. Each girl is unique and I have constructed their stories about their lives which matter to them, and me. I have and continue to wrestle with those unspoken words, those silences, those girls who are different or who have been marginalized. Where do they escape? At times I felt that these girls were left alone to make sense of opposing views from their families, peer groups, school, and the media.

These girls have courage and deserve to be heard. They must have a voice in creating their futures in order to become whole and active women. Who validates their uniqueness? How do I celebrate difference? Each girl has a strong desire to be independent and connected to family, friends and teachers and this must be acknowledged. They crave wisdom and empathy. As a woman researcher, mother, and feminist educator I recognize that generational connections are essential. I see and believe that there is a need to "re-invent womanhood" (Heilbrun, 1979). I want to recognize voices of girls. I must create spaces and validate their lived experiences. The struggles these girls live are similar to the ones I continue to live today. We do not need to "get" permission to enter and withdraw from the world we live in.

This work has encouraged a belief that I must continue to network with girls and stay in touch with their lives. I must give them the information they need in relation to the concerns they pursue. We need to make spaces so that we can talk amongst ourselves. As a woman I can work in a variety of settings to offer them insights and herstories of womanhood. Together we will change these stories that shape our lives so that:

> In the end, the changed life for women will be marked, I feel certain, by laughter. It is the unfailing key to a new kind of life. In films, novels, plays, stories, it is laughter of women together that is the revealing sign, the spontaneous recognition of insight and love and freedom. (Heilbrun, 1988, p.129)

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Valuing girls and girlhood

> In education, in marriage, in religion, in everything
> disappointment is the lot of women.
> It shall be the business of my life to deepen
> this disappointment in every woman's heart
> until she bows down to it no longer.
>
> Lucy Stone, in Culley, 1985, p.210.

I believe that an equitable education for all Canadians is the greatest hope we can provide our nation. Working with the four girls over time, engaging in conversations and hearing deeply their stories has not always been reassuring. They echoed stories that tugged at my silences of not participating equally in schooling experiences, reporting stories of not being heard or listened to. The girls told stories echoing unequitable amounts of teacher attention, of being fearful or of being a bother to teachers. This concerns me. They shared stories of alienation and boredom stemming from reading books and curriculum materials that did not reflect their lived experiences. The shortchanging of girls can no longer be ignored. We owe our girls the necessary information to make the real life decisions they will face as women in our Canadian culture. The evaded curriculum must be opened up to students, teachers, and parents. Matters central to the lives of students must include the functioning of healthy bodies, the expression of values and feelings, and the dynamics of power. How might these and other subjects be more meaningful, relevant and satisfying for girls lives? How might the daily texture of life be included in the culturally scripted stories of schooling girls? And how do I want the discourse to change?

How will teachers awaken to the gender differentials and the power relations lived out in their classrooms? How might schools and teachers be able to facilitate a curriculum that mirrors the realities of the girls lived experiences? How might we validate their lives outside the classroom? For me, the challenges and hopes emerging from this study include political action and further research, for professional

development with teachers, for work in classrooms, and for teacher education.

Why is it, when I observe, listen to and study our culture's activities that girls and girlhood are almost invisible? Until we value girls and girlhood I believe, we will continue to ignore and shortchange their lives. But not, until we define girls; then, maybe. Children are rarely distinguished by sex but are rather marked by age. "Oh, s/he is four now, all four year olds do that." "Ah, thirteen, it is just a phase." I am skeptical of the practice of understanding children and adolescents by age. When I started my work with girls I talked with several people, read research, and found myself struggling to name these girls. Some referred to "girl child", Lorde (1984) used the phrase "woman child". When I attended the Association of American University Women's conference in the fall of 1992, I heard teachers and researchers referring to "young women". The different phrases brought out the variety of perceptions. I changed my naming of the girls frequently throughout this project. Because I am not Lousia May Alcott I could not use "little women". First I wrote about them as "young girls", then as "young women". My friend, Nina, asked "why not simply girls?" What was I concealing by saying, "young women"? Why was I denying them their childhood? I asked myself about my own mothering and raising of my daughter. Am I raising her as a woman child? What sorts of boundaries does naming female children impose?

Many of us are looking at girlhood in our culture. Gilligan & Brown, 1992; Lyons, 1990; Holmes and Silverman, 1992; Walkerdine, 1990; Hancock, 1989, and the 1992 American Association of University Women's report are uncovering stories of girls' lived experience. Deciding which of the phrases to use "girl child", "woman child", "young woman" or "girls" was a dilemma. "Girls" was my choice even though the term can easily sound insignificant, frivolous and second rate. My reason has been that girls are invisible and that this must change. Girls and girlhood must be valued by being seen, heard, and understood.

In writing my thesis I have puzzled over this dilemma. Is it because "girls" is an easy bridge to "girlies", or "gals", and images of naked females with staples in their airbrushed midsection? These

connotations must be eliminated before girls can sound like something to do with gender rather than our present images of "sex" and "giggles". Perhaps, this makes girls more vulnerable, and for some, unfortunately, easy to ridicule. People still refer to fifty year old women as "girls". The awareness of this dishonor to women and girls makes me want to be careful about how I portray us.

I think my study opens up questions for all of us in teacher education and teaching. I have learned a great deal from girls' stories and photographs. My hopes are that girls will not participate in the 'same' curriculum lived now. My hope is that they will have teachers and adults in their worlds who will begin to listen, and to encourage them to resist the culturally accepted stories scripted for girlhood. I also hope that women who work with girls continue to find and live out the courage it takes in telling stories of silence, in order that girls when they are grown will be able to recall their early courage and draw upon it later in life. (Heilbrun, 1992; Bach & Clandinin & Greggs, 1993)

I have come to understand girls' experiences through diverse ways. And as I relive and retell these stories which are modified as they are restoried, perhaps, little else may be known about the phenomenon and thus a need arises to search again. Mao Tse-Tung, said "If you want knowledge, you must take part in the practice of changing reality." (Stockard, 1980, p.119)

As I learn to live my life with new directions and recall my courage of past experiences, I see them again with fresh eyes. I care about girls' lives. I care about children's lives. I want equity for girls, I want them to be seen, heard and understood. For me, this means more than changing text books, or changing images of women and girls in media, literature, and science. Girls have many educators in their lives and teachers in classrooms can <u>not</u> do it alone. Working with girls and hearing their stories of school makes it clear that their educational experiences must change. We must create spaces that value girls lived experiences inside and outside of the classroom. There is a vital need to encourage girls to create "textbooks" of their lives. There is a vital need to create safe spaces for girls to say what they think and feel so that they will not go underground.

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